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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

روزنامہ ساحل بنگلور

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In a 1st, PM addresses Israel Parl

Backs Gaza peace plan, says 'terrorism anywhere threatens peace everywhere'

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday became the first Indian premier to address Israel's Parliament, the Knesset, delivering a strong message of solidarity and backing the Gaza Peace Initiative as a path to "just and durable peace" in the region.

Describing terrorism as a global threat, Modi said, "Terrorism anywhere threatens peace everywhere," and reiterated India's "consistent and uncompromising policy of zero tolerance" with no double standards.

"I also carry with me the deepest condolences of the people of India for every life lost and for every family whose world was shattered in the barbaric terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October, 2023," Modi said.

"We feel your pain. We share your grief. India stands with Israel, firmly, with full conviction, in this moment, and beyond. No cause can justify the murder of civilians. Nothing can justify terrorism," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu during a meeting, in Tel Aviv, Israel on Wednesday —PTI

Referring to the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, he underlined the need for sustained and coordinated global action against terror. He also expressed support for the UN Security Council-endorsed Gaza Peace Initiative, saying it offers a pathway to lasting peace, including addressing the Palestine issue.

Modi said he was born on the same day that India formally recognised Israel, 1 September, 1950.

Modi noted that Israel's signing of the Abraham Accords had sparked hope in the region, though the path ahead remains challenging. "Let our efforts be guided by wisdom, courage and humanity," he said. The Prime Minister was received at Ben Gurion Airport by his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara, in what Israeli media described as a "strategic reset" and "landmark moment". This is Modi's second visit to Israel in nine years; ties were elevated to a strategic partnership during his 2017 trip. Both leaders held extensive talks covering defence, innovation, cybersecurity, trade and regional developments. Defence cooperation remains a key pillar, with Israel supplying major military platforms to India. New Delhi is also exploring elements of Israel's Iron Dome for its proposed indigenous air defence shield, "Sudarshan Chakra".

Modi said he looked forward to strengthening bilateral ties. Netanyahu described their relationship as a close personal friendship. Modi began his speech with "Shalom, Namaste," which was met with resounding applause from Israeli lawmakers. —PTI

>>>More on Pages 3 & 5

Cong: Epstein laid foundation of India-Israel ties

Congress on Wednesday claimed that the emails from "Epstein Files" show that the post 2014 India–Israel ties were shaped by late convicted American sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Congress' Pawan Khera said that India's foreign policy on Israel and Palestine was traditionally grounded in the "two nation theory", but was altered by a "US–Israel lobby". Khera said an email on 4 January, 2017, shows Union Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri asking to meet Epstein. The duo allegedly met on 6 January. He noted that global financer Epstein then contacted wellness guru Deepak Chopra asking about businessman Anil Ambani, who he met on 21 February, 2017.

>>>More on Page 3

UK makes eVisas mandatory for Indian travellers

LONDON, 25 FEB

From Wednesday, Indian travellers to the UK must obtain an eVisa under the country's new digital immigration system. Paper visas are being phased out, though applicants will still need to visit centres for biometric registration. Airlines may deny boarding without valid digital permission, including eVisa or Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA). UK Minister for Migration Mike Tapp emphasised the change ensures secure, tamper-proof travel documentation. Indians must keep UKVI accounts updated with current passport details to avoid disruption. The move aligns with global trends towards digitised borders and contactless immigration services. —PTI

>>>More on Page 5

Govt mandates E20 petrol across India from April

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The government has directed that petrol with up to 20 per cent ethanol (E20) and a minimum Research Octane Number (RON) of 95 be sold across all states and Union Territories from 1 April, 2026. The 17 February notification from the Oil Ministry allows exceptions in special circumstances or for specific regions for a limited period. Ethanol, produced from sugarcane, maize or grain, is renewable, domestically made and burns cleaner than conventional petrol. The policy aims to reduce oil imports, cut emissions and support farmers by boosting demand for sugarcane, maize and other agricultural surplus. —PTI

>>>More on Page 7

35M would have died in Pak: Trump on Op Sindoor

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

US President Donald Trump has claimed that Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif told him 35 million lives would have been lost if not for his intervention in stopping a potential war between India and Pakistan. Speaking in his over 100-minute State of the Union address on Tuesday, Trump repeated that during his first 10 months in office he ended eight wars, including a possible nuclear conflict between the two South Asian neighbours. He said Sharif had credited him with saving millions of lives, citing earlier statements where he referenced lower figures of 25 million and 10 million. Trump has asserted on roughly 100 occasions since May last year that Washington mediated a "full and immediate" ceasefire between India and Pakistan, although India has consistently denied any third-party role. —PTI

Six-month-old Balakumar was admitted to Chinmaya Mission Hospital (CMH) in Indiranagar with a high fever —SALAR

B'luru nurse severs baby's finger while removing bandage

YOHAN P HONNADDI
BENGALURU, 25 FEB

A six-month-old infant being treated for fever at a City hospital allegedly lost a finger when a nurse tried to remove a bandage for the IV drip.

The alleged medical negligence took place at Chinmaya Mission Hospital (CMH) in Indiranagar, prompting police to register an FIR against three nurses, a doctor and the hospital management.

Bengaluru resident Vijayakumar admitted his son Balakumar to the hospital on 19 February with high fever. He was to be discharged on 24 February, when the incident occurred.

Vijayakumar told **Salar News** that a nurse accidentally cut his baby's left little finger while removing a bandage.

"It happened before my eyes. While removing the dressing, the nurse inserted the scissors on the wrong side. Within seconds, my baby's finger was cut," he said.

But the baby was rushed to the Intensive Care Unit, where doctors informed the family that the damaged portion had to be completely removed due to the severity of the injury.

The family accused a doctor identified as Anita and the hospital administration of medical negligence.

A case has been filed under Section 125(b) of the BNS, 2023, for endangering life and safety. The child's family has demanded strict action for causing the lifelong disability, Police Sub-Inspector Sudarshan said.

CMH Medical Director Dr Manoj told **Salar News** that the hospital performed plastic surgery to reconstruct the finger and has taken action against those responsible.

The infant remains under treatment. —*Salar News*

J'khand crash: Plane had no cockpit voice & data recorder

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The nearly 40-year-old Beechcraft C90A aircraft that crashed in Jharkhand on Monday, killing seven people, did not have cockpit voice or flight data recorders, Directorate General of Civil Aviation said.

The mandatory requirement for a cockpit voice and flight data recorders was not in place when the aircraft was issued an airworthiness certificate in 1987. The certificate was valid till January 20, 2027

On February 23, Redbird Airways Pvt Ltd's Beechcraft C90A aircraft VT-AJV, operating as an air ambulance from Ranchi to Delhi, crashed soon after takeoff. Five people and two crew members onboard died in the accident in the forested area near Simaria in Jharkhand's Chatra district.

In what could pose hurdles for investigators in probing the factors that could have led to the crash is the absence of a black box. Black box refers to the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder that records crucial data about an aircraft. The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau is probing the crash. —PTI

NCERT cancels book after SC flags 'graft in judiciary' chapter

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has withdrawn a Class 8 social science textbook from its website after the Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of a chapter on judicial corruption. Sources indicate the government was displeased with the inclusion of the controversial topic.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi acted after senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Singhvi raised the matter, with CJI Kant emphasising that no one can defame the judiciary or taint its integrity.

The textbook highlighted challenges faced by the judiciary, including corruption, a

massive backlog of cases, and inadequate numbers of judges. It cited pending cases of around 81,000 in the Supreme Court, 62.4 lakh in high courts, and 4.7 crore in district and subordinate courts. It also mentioned internal accountability mechanisms, the CPGRAMS complaint system, and over 1,600 grievances received between 2017 and 2021.

The book quoted former CJI B R Gavai, who noted corruption and misconduct undermine public confidence but stressed transparency and accountability could rebuild trust. Government sources said the Law Ministry was not consulted for fact verification and the quote was taken out of context. Officials argued that discussions of corruption should encompass all three branches of government, not single out the judiciary.

NCERT is reportedly reviewing the chapter with subject experts, while schools in Delhi have received no directives on teaching the content. Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal stated 8,639 complaints were filed against judges between 2016 and 2025, with 1,170 in 2024 alone. Former Law Minister Ashwani Kumar praised CJI Kant's swift action. —PTI

>>>More on Pages 2, 4

PUBLIC FIGURES IN HIGH OFFICES CAN'T TARGET ANY COMMUNITY: SC

Supreme Court observed that public figures holding high constitutional offices must not target any community on the basis of religion, language, caste or region. The court said neither State nor non-State actors can vilify or denigrate any community through speeches, memes, cartoons or visual art. The remarks were made by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan while delivering judgment on a plea challenging the re-release of the upcoming movie Ghooskhor Pandat'. The court had earlier declined to stay the film's release after recording filmmaker Neeraj Pandey's affidavit.

Girl found pregnant at Koppal govt school hostel

KOPPAL, 25 FEB

A PUC student of Morarji Desai Residential School was found to be pregnant following an alleged sexual assault on the pretext of marriage, triggering intense backlash across the district.

The incident occurred on 19 February after the girl was sent for a medical examination due to heavy bleeding. Test results confirmed that she was pregnant. She is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital.

Police said the accused allegedly forced the minor into a physical relationship under the promise of marriage and later threatened to kill her if she disclosed the matter.

A case has been registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The identity of the accused has not been released, and he is currently being interrogated. Further evidence related to the case is being collected.

The incident has raised serious concerns about the safety and security of students in residential schools. Questions are being raised over how the school staff and warden remained unaware of the situation.

There are also allegations that attempts were made to cover up the matter. Members of the Students' Federation of India (SFI) staged a protest, accusing the school administration of negligence and demanding immediate action against the principal. —*Salar News*

IN BENGALURU

Brain dead teen's organs save 6 lives

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

The family of a 19-year-old youth donated his organs after he was declared brain dead, giving a new lease of life to six patients, officials said on Wednesday.

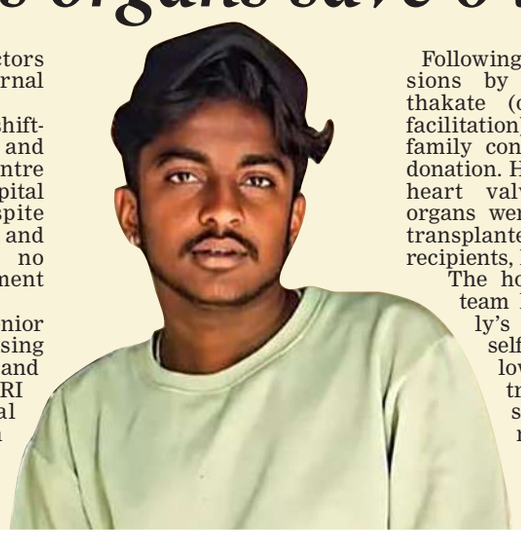
Darshan, a native of Chikka Mandya village in Karnataka's Mandya district, fell off his bike on February 22 and sustained injuries, they said.

Initially dismissing the fall, he returned home and went to sleep, officials added.

According to a statement, when his condition worsened, he was rushed to a hospital, where doctors detected a severe internal brain haemorrhage.

He was immediately shifted to the Trauma and Emergency Care Centre (TECC) at Victoria Hospital in Bengaluru. Despite extensive treatment and tests, he showed no response, the statement said.

After two days, a senior medical panel comprising Dr Kavya, Dr Deepak, and Dr Asima Banu of BMCRI (Bengaluru Medical College and Research Institute) declared him brain dead, officials said.



Following counselling sessions by the jeevasaarthakate (organ donation facilitation) team, Darshan's family consented to organ donation. His liver, kidneys, heart valves and other organs were retrieved and transplanted into eligible recipients, Dr Asima said.

The hospital's medical team lauded the family's courageous and selfless decision, following which the transplants were successfully carried out at the TECC, officials said.

—*Salar News*

Cong, BJP spar over ads in Urdu newspaper

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao and the BJP sparred on Wednesday over an Urdu advertisement issued for the launch of the State's "Kusuma Sanjeevini" pro-gramme, which offers prophylactic treatment for haemophilia patients and free ambu-lance services.

The advertisement, published in several newspapers including Urdu dailies in Karnataka, triggered criticism from the BJP, which accused the Congress government of neglecting Kannada and indulging in appeasement politics.

In a post on X, the party questioned whether Kannada or Urdu was the State's administrative language and asked who authorised an "official invitation" in Urdu. The party told Rao, "Speak Urdu in your home if you wish, but remember that Kannada is the administrative language of Karnataka."

The 'speak Urdu' jibe was apparently aimed at Rao's wife Tabassum who is a Muslim and is often targeted by the BJP leaders for her faith.

Rao dismissed the charge as misleading, clarifying that it was only a newspaper advertisement to inform Urdu readers, not an official invitation.

He noted similar advertisements were issued during BJP governments. —PTI

— X

BJP protests in Gadag to support arrested MLA

GADAG, 25 FEB

The BJP on Wednesday staged a protest in Lakshmeshwar town of Gadag district in support of party MLA Chandru Lamani, who is currently in judicial custody after allegedly being caught red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 5 lakh from a contractor a few days ago. A large number of party workers and supporters marched through Lakshmeshwar, holding placards, banners and posters. Demonstrators raised slogans against the Congress government, accusing it of having "trapped" the legislator. Condemning the arrest, BJP leaders and supporters alleged that the Congress had conspired against Lamani for political reasons. The party further claimed that the State government was targeting members of the Banjara community. *—PTI*

Gadag ASI caught taking Rs 10,000 bribe to shut case

GADAG, 25 FEB

An assistant sub-inspector was caught while allegedly accepting a Rs 10,000 bribe to close a petition in this district on Wednesday, officials said. The accused was nabbed in a trap laid by the Lokayukta police following a complaint, they added. According to Lokayukta officials, the complainant alleged that ASI C V Ingalhalli, posted at the town police station in Gadag, had demanded Rs 10,000 to close an anonymous petition filed against his mother. "The accused government officer was caught while receiving the bribe amount at the town police station here. *—PTI*

1,832 honoured during JSSTU's 8th convocation

MYSURU, 25 FEB

At the 8th convocation of JSS Science and Technology University held at the SJCE campus in Mysuru, degrees were conferred on 1,832 graduates, including 1,081 BE, 63 BCA, 161 MSc, 281 MBA, 99 MTech and 29 PhD scholars. Thirty-seven rank holders received medals and 37 students were presented endowment awards. BM Jayeshankar, Chairman and Managing Director of Adarsh Group, Bengaluru, urged students to uphold honesty, integrity and hard work. He stressed the importance of work-life balance to prevent burnout and maintain long-term productivity. He also encouraged graduates to build sustainable technologies that enhance human dignity. Suttur Mutt seer Shivarathri Deshikendra Swamiji and other dignitaries were present. *—Salar News*

— X @NIMMABHASKAR22

Bhaskar Rao's kin found after 10-day 'self-discovery'

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Former Bengaluru Police commissioner Bhaskar Rao has been reunited with his nephew Aniruddh Ramesh, who had been missing for nearly 10 days. Bhaskar had sought the help of social media users to locate Anirudh on 23 February, after filing a missing persons complaint on 17 February. "Aniruddha is fine, he is highly educated and was on a untethered solo trip of self-discovery," Bhaskar shared on X on Thursday. He thanked Deputy Commissioner of Police for the South-East Division of the Bengaluru City Police Mohammad Sujeetha MS and the thousands of netizens for their help in locating Aniruddh. *—Salar News*

Only 8,000 govt jobs filled, not 40,000: Vijayendra

BYV slams CM after thousands aspirants protested

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

State BJP President BY Vijayendra lashed out at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, accusing him of "misleading" the public on government recruitment figures and "failing" to address the concerns of unemployed youth in Karnataka. Vijayendra said that only 8,157 government recruitments took place in three years, contrary to the Congress' claims of 40,000.

Vijayendra on Wednesday accused Siddaramaiah of deflecting accountability instead of initiating concrete steps to fill vacant posts after thousands of people protested in Dharwad on Tuesday.

"Chief Minister, please refrain from misleading the people. Do not attempt to shift the blame for all your shortcomings onto the BJP and evade responsibility," the Shikaripura MLA said.

Siddaramaiah reacted to the Dharwad protests by saying that when the Congress came to power in 2023, over 2.64 lakh government posts were vacant. Siddaramaiah said that the vacancies were due to the BJP's prolonged inaction.

But Vijayendra said that there was more to the story.

"According to the official figures presented by your own government in the Legislative Assembly, only 8,157 government recruitments have been completed during your three years in office. Yet publicly claiming that 40,000 posts have been filled raises serious concerns. Does this not amount to misleading the unemployed youth?" Vijayendra said.

Siddaramaiah then said that the shortages would be filled in a phased manner, saying that the issue arose because of internal reservation disputes.

State BJP President BY Vijayendra speaks at a press conference in Bengaluru on Thursday *—X @BYVIJAYENDRA*

MEDICINE SHORTAGES

Speaking at a presser in the City, Vijayendra alleged medicine shortages, large-scale irregularities and disruption of services in the health department. "The health department itself is in the ICU," he said. He alleged that a private individual from Mangaluru is controlling the State's medicine procurement system, spking prices. *—PTI*

Old guard can't stay forever: DKS

BENGALURU/ MANGALURU, 25 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in Bengaluru has voiced his support for the induction of "new blood" into the Cabinet, saying the old guard cannot continue indefinitely.

Shivakumar was reacting to a query on first-time MLAs writing to senior party leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and All India Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, seeking representation in the State Cabinet during the proposed reshuffle.

"The party needs new blood and fresh thinking. I support fresh blood," Shivakumar said.

Meanwhile, former chief minister M Veerappa Moily backed the 31 MLAs and said the party should prioritise merit over experience

LEADERSHIP CHANGE?

Reacting to remarks by his Cabinet colleague HC Mahadevappa on the Dalit chief minister issue, Shivakumar said he had no information about any leadership change in the State.

"I saw Mahadevappa's statement. He is our High Command, and he may have some information," Shivakumar said.

Asked whether the High Command had summoned him and Siddaramaiah to Delhi, he clarified, "I haven't got any calls. I have to visit Delhi for some work related to my department."

On criticism that he had remained silent over ministers' statements despite being the KPCC President, Shivakumar said: "It is the CM who has to regulate the Ministers and MLAs. I am doing the job of communicating it."

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Referring to Central funds for urban development, he said the Centre was releasing Rs 1 lakh crore, but had indicated it was not meant for bigger cities. Shivakumar said that he will ask the Urban Development Minister to prepare a proposal for tier two and three cities. *—Agencies*

Shivamogga calm but tense after teen's death: HM

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the situation in Shivamogga city is "under control" following the murder of a teenage boy. Parameshwara urged people to maintain peace, warning that strict action would be taken if law and order is disturbed.

On 23 February, a 15-year-old student was murdered at Karnataka's Shivamogga after a 'cricket match-related argument' broke out between a group in the area, Superintendent of Police Nikhil B said on Tuesday. Seven people were detained in connection with the case. However, it soon took communal undertones and tensions prevailed in Shivamogga.

ON ABVP ATTACKING AZIM PREMJI VARSITY

On members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) vandalising Azim Premji University on Tuesday over alleged "anti-national" activities in the campus, Parameshwara said that police have taken action.

"If somebody tries to take the law into their own hands, we will definitely handle them," he added. He questioned why the row had erupted.

"If it is against the whole system, against the whole country, the action will be different," Parameshwara said. "It was a discussion about Kashmir. I'm not sure what was against the country's interest."

BJP leader BY Vijayendra said anti-national elements were given a free hand. *—ANI*

ED files chargesheet for Ranya Rao's 'gold smuggling'

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday filed a chargesheet before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Bengaluru against Kannada actor Ranya Rao and two others in connection with an alleged gold smuggling-linked money laundering case.

Apart from Rao, also known as Harshavardini Ranya, 32, the prosecution complaint names her alleged associate Tarun Konduru and Ballari-based gold dealer Sahil Sakariya Jain. The ED case stems from an earlier action by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), which arrested Rao on 3 March, 2025, at Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru after she arrived from Dubai.

Officials recovered 14.2 kg of gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crore from her possession when Rao was returning from Dubai.

According to the ED, the probe found that 127.28 kg of gold valued at Rs 102.55 crore was smug- gled into India during March 2024-March 2025. The smuggled gold was disposed of in the domestic market through a network of handlers and jewellers, it said.

The proceeds of the sale were generated in cash and settled through "hawala" channels in India and abroad, the ED said. These funds were further layered and routed through multiple bank accounts and entities to appear as legitimate business transactions, it claimed.

The probe found an "organised" and "structured" mechanism, involving the procurement of gold abroad, illegal import into India, cash-based disposal and subsequent laundering was taking place. Assets worth Rs 34 crore of Rao were attached by the ED. *—PTI*

11-yr-old booked over 'Pakistan Zindabad' slogan

UDUPI, 25 FEB

The police have registered a case against an 11-year-old boy for allegedly raising pro-Pakistan slogans at a salon in Udupi district.

The minor has been identified as the son of a migrant worker from Bihar.

He had reportedly visited a salon for a haircut when he shouted 'Pakistan Zindabad', following which local residents lodged a complaint. Based on the complaint, the Kundapura Rural Police initiated an investigation into the incident.

Police sources indicated that there are allegations that the boy may have been instigated by others to raise the slogan. A separate case has also been registered in connection with the alleged provocation.

The incident was recorded on a mobile phone by those present at the salon, and the video has gone viral on social media. Authorities have cautioned against sharing the video, noting that the accused is a minor and the content is sensitive. Legal action would be taken against those found circulating the video. *—Salar News*

Expelled-BJP MLA Yatnal booked for hate speech again

YADGIR, 25 FEB

The police have registered a case against Vijayapura MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal for allegedly delivering a hate speech against Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in Yadgir.

The incident occurred in Gurumathkal town of this district, where the expelled-BJP MLA attended an event as the chief guest following a grand procession on the occasion of Shivaji Jayanti on 21 February.

According to the FIR, Yatnal allegedly made several controversial remarks during his address. He quoted a Hindi poem targeting a particular community and made statements concerning Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. He referred to Gandhi as the 'Father of Pakistan'.

He also referred to "love jihad" while allegedly targeting a particular community, and made derogatory remarks on certain historical figures.

Police said the speech triggered backlash across the news and social media platforms, with many accusing the leader of inciting communal disharmony.

Following a preliminary enquiry, including examination of the video recording of the speech and preparation of its transcript, legal opinion was sought from the district police office.

A case was registered on 23 February under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at the Gurumathkal Police Station.

He has been booked for derogatory remarks before in the past. *—Salar News*

SC SETTLES CENTURY-OLD DISPUTE OVER AMOGHASIDDA TEMPLE

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Supreme Court has settled a century-old dispute over hereditary pujari rights at the Amoghasidda Temple in Vijayapura district, upholding a 2012 Karnataka High Court verdict in favour of the respondents.

A bench of Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and K Vinod Chandran dismissed the appeals, rejecting the appellants' claim based largely on a 1901 decree. The court noted that the decree's effect was undermined when their predecessor filed a suit for possession in 1944.

"A party in settled possession does not sue for possession," the bench observed, calling it a categorical admission that possession was not with them at the time.

The dispute concerned rival claims to perform pooja, receive devotees' offerings, and conduct the annual Jatra at the temple dedicated to saint Amoghasidda. The court said the appellants failed to provide specific details about when they assumed possession or began performing rituals. In contrast, the respondents backed their claim with consistent documentary and revenue records. Finding no perversity in the High Court ruling, the apex court dismissed the appeals. *—PTI*

CHIKPET BURNS

Nearly 32 shops were gutted after a fire erupted from a hardware warehose in Kumbarpet, Chikpet, in Bengaluru on Thursday morning. No casualties were reported, but 15 vehicles from Fire and Emergency Services were deployed the spot. The blaze allegedly broke out due to a short circuit *—MOHAMMED ASAD*

RS 50/TONNE TO FARMERS

Sugarcane farmers to get Rs 300cr aid soon

BENGALURU, 25 FEB

The Karnataka government has released Rs 300 crore as financial assistance to sugarcane growers for the 2025-26 season, with Rs 50 per tonne to be credited directly to farmers who supplied cane to sugar factories across the State, Agricultural Marketing Minister Shivanand Patil said on Wednesday.

The assistance forms part of the State's commitment to provide Rs 100 per tonne over and above the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP), with the burden to be shared equally between the government and sugar factories, Patil, who holds Sugarcane Development, Sugar, Textiles and Agricultural Marketing said in a statement.

This comes after sugar prices crashed last year *—ANI*

After the Chief Minister met sugar factory owners and sugarcane growers at Vidhana Soudha on 8 November amid a price crash, the decision was taken that the State government would bear Rs 50 of the cost, and factories the other Rs 50.

Based on proposals submitted by sugar factories, the Sugarcane Development Commissioner will release the funds to the Deputy Commissioners, which is to be credited into the bank accounts of farmers, based on the quantity of cane supplied, he said.

Deputy Commissioners have been instructed to ensure that sugar factory managements provide their share of Rs 50 per tonne to eligible farmers, Patil explained.

Providing details of the ongoing crushing season, Patil said that 521 lakh metric tonne of sugarcane have been crushed, and about 600 lakh metric tonne are expected to be crushed during the season. The crushing season is set to conclude in the first week of March.

During the 2025-26 season, 81 sugar factories have undertaken crushing operations, of which 29 have completed the process, he added. *—PTI*

INSIDE AMAZON'S
2ND LARGEST
OFFICE IN ASIA
Amazon inaugurated a massive office in North Bengaluru on Monday, its the second largest office in Asia. Here's what it means:
7,000 EMPLOYEES
can work at the facility across departments such as technology, ecommerce, operations, payments, seller service, and leadership functions.
This comes as Amazons seeks to invest
$35 BILLION
in India.
15 km from Kempegowda International Airport.
1.1 million sqft on a 5-acre site.
12 FLOORS
Largest campus is in Hyderabad
3 million sqft across 9.5 acres.
15,000 people can work at the facility.

'Sasikala's new party is like instant idli, sambar'

CHENNAI, 25 FEB

AMMK leader TTV Dhinakaran mocked his aunt V K Sasikala's political party launch, likening it to "instant sambar and idli" and said the NDA's prospects at the hustings will not be affected by it. On 24 February, while celebrating the 78th birth anniversary of late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa in Ramanathapuram's Kamuthi, Sasikala made a dramatic comeback in politics by announcing the launch of her own political party. She unveiled her party flag carrying the images of former chief ministers: CN Annadurai, MG Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa, and targeted AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, who had expelled her from the party. —PTI

Kerala health minister injured during protest

KANNUR, 25 FEB

Veena George was allegedly injured during a protest by activists of opposition student organisations at Kannur railway station on Tuesday. The incident took place when the minister arrived at the station to board a train. Protesters reportedly gathered at the premises, leading to tense scenes as police personnel attempted to escort her safely. AN Shamseer, who was present at the station at the time, told reporters that the minister sustained injuries to her hand and neck during the commotion. Television visuals showed the minister surrounded by police officers and caught in the midst of the protesters as they raised slogans. Following the incident, she was shifted to a government hospital for medical attention. —PTI

—ANI

Sharad Pawar discharged from Pune hospital

PUNE, 25 FEB

Sharad Pawar, chief of the NCP (SP), was discharged from Ruby Hall Clinic in Pune on Wednesday morning after being treated for dehydration. The 85-year-old Rajya Sabha member had been admitted on Sunday following complaints of dehydration. Dr Purvez Grant, chief cardiologist, chairman and managing trustee of the private hospital, said Pawar is doing well and has already left for Mumbai. He has been advised to rest for a few days before resuming his regular schedule. Earlier this month, the fomer Union minister was admitted to the same hospital on 9 Februarydue to a chest infection and was discharged on 14 February.- —PTI

SC stays trial against J'khand CM in fraud case

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the trial in money laundering case registered against Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren. The top court issued notice to the Enforcement Directorate on the plea of Soren in which he had sought quashing of the case. In his plea, Soren had also challenged the repetitive summons issued to him by the ED. Soren has challenged the recent Jharkhand High Court's decision refusing to quash the case against him. On January 15, the high court refused to quash the cognisance taken against Soren by a special MP-MLA court in a complaint case filed by the ED, dealing a setback to the JMM leader. The ED had filed a complaint case against Soren for not appearing before it despite summonses issued by it in connection with his alleged involvement in a land scam. —PTI

'Epstein introduced Anil to ex-Israel PM'

Pawan Khera claims MEA was sidelined with foreign policy run by Puri, Anil Ambani

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Congress media head Pawan Khera on Wednesday quoted alleged email exchanges between American sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and Anil Ambani. He said Epstein introduced Anil to former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak on 23 February, 2017. Ambani continued liaising with Barak on matters connected to India.

Congress leader Pawan Khera addresses a press briefing at the Congress headquarters, in New Delhi. —PTI

Among the cited emails, an exchange on 2 March, 2017, showed:

- At 3.11pm Ambani wrote to Epstein seeking "guidance on dealing with the White House for India's relationship and defence cooperation."
- Epstein replied at 3.12pm: "Remember what are you willing to give. No ideology needed. Tit for tat."
- Ambani responded at 3.14pm: "Indian market, whatever works."
- Epstein at 3.19pm: "I will get some inside baseball (scoop) for you."

Addressing the media with a big movie-like parody poster, 'Jeffrey Ne Bana Di Jodi', behind him, Khera said emails showed Epstein asking Barak about India's role in US defence priorities. On 16 March, 2017, Ambani wrote that "leadership" wanted Epstein's help to arrange meetings with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and aide Steve Bannon. Ambani also sought support for Modi's upcoming visit to meet Donald Trump.

Khera claimed the Ministry of External Affairs was sidelined, with foreign policy being "run" by Puri, Ambani and Epstein.

Khera said the following defence deals were signed due to Epstein's influence:

- 2017: $2 billion missile system agreement.
- 2017: Pegasus intelligence package.
- 2018: Adani–Elbit joint venture in Hyderabad for drones – the first such facility outside Israel.
- 2022: Adani acquisition of Haifa port.
- 2020–25: Various defence contracts for light machine guns, anti submarine warfare and autonomous systems.

Khera pointed out to a mail from 24 May, 2019, between Epstein and Bannon. It said: "Really interesting modi meeting. He won [the 2019 parliamentary elections] with HUGE mandate. His guy said that no one in wash speaks to him however his main enemy is CHINA! And their proxy in the region pakistan. They will host the g20 in 22. Totally buys into your vision." (sic)

In another mail Epstein wrote, "Modi on board."

"This is why the prime minister is compromised," Khera said, "If Jeffrey Epstein can tell a White House official that 'Modi is on board,' it means he has control."Khera demanded investigations into Puri and Ambani, accusing the government of protecting its own.

Khera also alleged that between 2014 and 2017, when Puri was meeting Epstein, Ehud Barak's close associate and alleged Mossad operative Yoni Koren was living in the same apartment. —*Salar News*

- Pawan Khera also alleged that between 2014 and 2017, when Puri was meeting Epstein, Ehud Barak's close associate and alleged Mossad operative Yoni Koren was living in the same apartment.

PM MODI CONFERRED ISRAEL'S 'SPEAKER OF THE KNESSET MEDAL'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Wednesday conferred with the 'Speaker of the Knesset Medal' in recognition of his exceptional contribution to strengthening strategic relations between India and Israel.

The Indian Prime Minister is the first leader to receive this medal, which is the highest honour of the Knesset - the Israeli Parliament.

Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana conferred the award on the prime minister after his address at the Israeli Parliament.

The medal was conferred in recognition of the prime minister's exceptional contribution – through his personal leadership – to strengthen strategic relations between India and Israel.

PM Modi is a rare world leader who has received top awards from both Israel and Palestine. —PTI

DGCA at fault: Rohit on action against VRS

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar on Wednesday attacked aviation regulator DGCA, claiming that it had earlier attempted to give aviation company VSR Ventures a "clean chit", but later admitted that the firm had flouted safety norms.

VSR Ventures Private Limited was the company that operated the ill-fated Learjet 45 aircraft (VT-SSK) plane which crashed near the Baramati airstrip in Pune district on 28 January, killing Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar and four others.

Speaking to reporters on the Vidhan Bhavan premises here, Pawar said the report issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation

(DGCA) at 1.36pm on 28 January had stated that during the last regulatory audit conducted in February 2025, no "Level-I findings" were reported against VSR Ventures.

"When Ajit Pawar's body was taken to the hospital, the DGCA issued the report. It was the first attempt to issue a clean chit to VSR," he alleged.

Questioned on the regulator's role, Pawar If VSR is at fault, then the DGCA is also at fault." —PTI

RaGa linked to pro-Pak elements: BJP

PATNA/NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

BJP President Nitin Nabin on Wednesday launched a blistering attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, accusing him of undertaking foreign visits without informing central security agencies, and having close links with "anti-India and pro-Pakistan" elements.

Nabin charged Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition, with being on a "compromised mission" that began with his great grandfather and first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and "continued through generations".

The BJP president's comments come amid a row over the Indian Youth Congress activists staging a shirtless protest at the AI Summit in Delhi last week, with the slogan "PM is compromised", an allusion to the proposed trade deal with the US allegedly under pressure from the Donald Trump administration

"Today, I wish to expose the compromised mission of the Nehru-Gandhi family, which has traded national interests for personal gains. I wish to expose Rahul Gandhi, who is trutting about like a babbar sher (lion)," the 45-year-old Bihar MLA, who was made Nabin month ago, told reporters.

NEHRU REDREW BHARAT BORDER

Meanwhile, in a series of posts on X with a "compromised Congress" hashtag, BJP chief spokesperson Anil Baluni said, "Nehru's No.1 duty as first PM: Protect and integrate Bharat's territory."

"Instead all through his reign he did Territorial compromise, 'piece by piece'- Tibet given up. Aksai Chin compromised. Berubari compromised. Punjab villages compromised. Rann of Kutch compromised. Kashmir was nearly compromised in parts," Baluni alleged. —PTI

Nehru statue vandalised in Assam

A statue of former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was vandalised in Assam's Cachar district, officials said on Wednesday.

The incident happened on the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday at Pailapool market in the Lakhipur police station area, they said.

Police station officer-in-charge Sankar Dayal told reporters said they have detained a person and seized the excavator used to uproot the statue.Congress's Silchar president Sajal Acherjee alleged that it was a planned attack. —PTI

PROOF OF IDENTITY

Class 10 admit cards, marksheet can be SIR ID in West Bengal

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Supreme Court on Wednesday clarified that Class 10 admit card accompanied by pass certificate can be produced as supplementary documentation for identity verification in the ongoing SIR exercise in West Bengal.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi passed the order after senior advocate DS Naidu mentioned the matter.

The lawyer expressed concerns about whether such admit cards can be permitted to be a standalone identity document.

The top court said it has already directed that the

admit card will only be a supplementary document.

"All documents mentioned in para 3(iii) of order dated February 24, 2026 which are not uploaded so far and received before February 15, shall be submitted by the Electoral Registration Officers, Assistant Electoral Registration Officers to the presiding judicial officers by tomorrow 5 PM.

"Similarly, para 3(iii)(c) is clarified to the effect that Madhyamik (Class 10) admit cards may be submitted along with pass certificate for the purpose of birth certificate and purposes of parentage," the bench said.

The apex court on Tuesday allowed the deployment of West Bengal civil judges, in addition to 250 district judges, and the requisitioning of judicial officers from Jharkhand and Odisha to handle 80 lakh claims and objections of those facing deletion from the electoral roll in the ongoing SIR exercise in the state. —PTI

Shah in Bihar, to review demography change

PURNEA/KISHANGANJ, 25 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah arrived in Bihar on Wednesday for a three-day tour during which he is expected to attend several functions in the strategically located Seemanchal region, besides reviewing "demographic changes" in the area.

During the day, he chaired a meeting of the Land Ports Authority of India, a statutory body functioning under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, which is responsible for creating, upgrading, maintaining and managing border infrastructure.

"Union Home Minister Amit Shah's tour of Seemanchal is a decisive step in the direction of strengthening national security. It is a strategically important region, by virtue of

its proximity to Nepal and Bangladesh and presents challenges with regard to maintaining an intelligence network and demographic balance," state BJP spokesperson Prem Ranjan Patel said in a statement.

After Shah reached Purnea airport, he was welcomed by senior Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and state party president Sanjay Saraogi. —PTI

CPI's Nallakannu no more, to get state honours

CHENNAI, 25 FEB

Veteran CPI leader and freedom fighter, R Nallakannu died here on Wednesday at a government hospital where he had been treated for age-related ailments.

He was aged about 101 following failure of vital organs.

Chief Minister MK Stalin announced full state honours at the funeral of the departed leader. Condolences poured in from across the political spectrum, paying

Nallakannu's intensive care was managed by a multidisciplinary team during his 24-day long hospitalisation. However, "from early this morning," he gradually became unresponsive to medicines and his condition rapidly deteriorated, the Madras Medical College-Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital said.

Stalin called Nallakannu an uncompromising fighter. The CPI leader had always remained firm in the belief that the Communist and the Dravidian ideologies were comrades that must function as double-barrelled gun for social change.

Former chief minister M Karunanidhi honored Nallakannu by presenting him the Ambedkar Award.

Stalin said Nallakannu, who lived his life entirely for the masses, shall forever remain etched in the hearts of the people.

The CM conveyed his 'deepest condolences' to his grieving family members, relatives, and all the comrades of the Communist party movement. -PTI

3 MORE IYC LEADERS HELD, PRYANKA CALLS IT 'HIGHLY CONDEMNABLE'

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

- The three Congress youth leaders Saurabh, Siddharth and Arbaz were apprehended by the Special Cell of Delhi Police from Shimla in Himachal Pradesh and produced before a local court there.

With three more Congress workers being arrested on Wednesday in connection with the "shirtless" protest at the AI Impact Summit here, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra slammed the police action terming it "highly condemnable" and "shameful".

The three Congress youth leaders Saurabh, Siddharth and Arbaz were apprehended by the Special Cell of Delhi Police from Shimla in Himachal Pradesh and produced before a local court there. They have been granted transit remand and are being brought to Delhi for further questioning, sources said.

Priyanka asserted that it is in the interest of 1.4 billion Indians to raise voice against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the government which has "compromised" India's interests by bowing to global pressure.

Her remarks came a day after Delhi Police arrested Indian Youth Congress president Uday Bhanu Chib as the "main conspirator" and "mastermind" of the shirtless protest at the AI Summit last week.

In a post in Hindi on X, Priyanka Gandhi said, "Peaceful and non-violent resistance for truth is our proud heritage, inherited from Mahatma Gandhi and millions of our Indian ancestors."

On Friday, a group of IYC workers staged a dramatic protest inside Hall No. 5 of the summit venue by removing their shirts to reveal T-shirts printed with slogans against the government and the India-US interim trade deal, before being whisked away by security personnel. —PTI

'IN SEACH OF ROOTS'

BJP MP seeks renaming of Delhi as 'Indraprastha'

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

BJP MP Praveen Khandelwal on Wednesday urged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to change the name of Delhi to Indraprastha, claiming that it reflects the city's true historical roots and cultural legacy.

In a letter to Shah, a day after the Union Cabinet gave its nod to rename Kerala to Keralam, the Lok Sabha MP from Delhi's Chandni Chowk constituency said that the Mahabharata describes Indraprastha as a magnificent city built on the banks of the Yamuna river, precisely matching the geographical setting of modern Delhi.

It is also supported by the Archaeological Survey of India's excavations at Purana Qila, Khandelwal claimed.

"Historical literature, archaeological findings and long-standing civilizational

Praveen Khandelwal —ANI

traditions establish that the present-day Delhi corresponds to the ancient city of Indraprastha, the grand capital established by the Pandavas as described in the epic Mahabharata," he said in the letter to the Union home minister.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) also raised the demand last year, arguing on the same lines.

- Indraprastha as a magnificent city built on the banks of the Yamuna river, precisely matching the geographical setting of modern Delhi. It is also supported by the Archaeological Survey of India's excavations at Purana Qila, Khandelwal claimed.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said the Centre should accept the West Bengal government's demand to rename the state, its approval of a similar proposal for Kerala.

"If a similar proposal was to be moved in the J&K assembly in the future, the Centre should also give it due consideration," he added. —PTI

UP boy's body found in pond; sorcery alleged

MATHURA, 25 FEB

The body of a nine-year-old boy was recovered from a pond in Taroli Junabi, with his family alleging possible links to occult practices, police said. Dushyant, a Class 6 pupil from Agra, had been staying with his mother at her parental home and went missing on 18 February after telling his grandmother he was going out to play. CCTV footage later showed him walking alone towards the village outskirts. His body was found on Tuesday. Additional Superintendent of Police (Rural) Suresh Chandra Rawat said a post-mortem has been conducted and the cause of death will be determined once the report is received. Police are examining all angles, including the family's allegations.—*PTI*

—*ANI*

Delhi HC protects personality rights of Ramdev

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Delhi High Court has restrained the unauthorised use of yoga guru Ramdev's name, image and voice, including in AI-generated and deepfake content. In an interim order on 18 February, Justice Jyoti Singh held that videos and social media pages falsely showing Ramdev endorsing products or medicines prima facie amount to misappropriation of his personality and publicity rights, potentially damaging his reputation and credibility. The court directed platforms to remove the offending material within 72 hours and barred the defendants, including unknown persons, from exploiting his identity for commercial or personal gain across any medium. Content claimed as parody or caricature will be considered separately at the next hearing of the court on 12 March.—*PTI*

Delhi couple held for racial slurs at NE women

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

A Delhi court on Wednesday sent a couple accused of hurling racial slurs at their Northeastern neighbours to 14 days of judicial custody. The couple was produced before Magistrate Bhanu Pratap Singh on Wednesday, who later remanded them in judicial custody till 11 March. On Wednesday, the Delhi Police arrested the married couple, Ruby Jain and Harsh, for allegedly hurling racial slurs at three of her neighbours from the Northeast in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area. The couple was taken into custody following an investigation. Ruby Jain allegedly made abusive and derogatory remarks against three women from Arunachal Pradesh during a heated argument over repair work at their rented accommodation in the city on 20 February. —*PTI*

Gangster claims responsibility in Delhi shootout

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

An FIR has been filed after a car carrying a lawyer associated with jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi came under fire near the ISBT in Kashmere Gate.Gangster Naveen Boxer allegedly claimed responsibility in a social media post, warning advocate Deepak Khatri, who had previously received threats. A case was registerd. The incident occurred on 24 February near the Marghat Wale Hanuman Temple. The car had five occupants; one sustained a shoulder injury and is in a stable condition. The police said witnesses gave differing accounts of the number of attackers. Police are verifying the social media claim, examining CCTV footage, and collecting forensic evidence to identify the assailants and trace their escape.—*PTI*

SC junks plea against 'Yadav Ji Ki Love Story'

SC defends its order on 'Ghooshkhor Pandat', says film's title carries negative connotation

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Supreme Court today dismissed a writ petition seeking a stay on release of the film 'Yadav Ji ki Love Story', noting that the title did not contain any adjective or word that attached any negative meaning to the community.

The court referred to its order against the film 'Ghooskhor Pandat', saying that the order was necessary as the expression 'ghooskhor' in 'Ghooskhor Pandat' means corrupt and carried a negative connotation.

'Yadav Ji ki Love Story' does not portray the Yadav community in a negative manner.

"We fail to understand how the title of the film reflects the community in bad light. The title of the film does not have any adjective or any word that portrays the Yadav community in bad light," the Court said.

"The expression "ghooskhor" in English means corrupt. A negative meaning was being attached to the community. In the instant case no such negativity is attached to the Yadav community", it said.

The petitioner contended that the title of the film created a direct and offensive stereotype against an identifiable community —*INSTAGRAM/PTI*

The Court further held that none of the reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2) of the Constitution were attracted.

The plea, filed through advocate-on-record Aftab Ali Khan, contended that the title created a direct and offensive stereotype against an identifiable caste/community.

It argued that the title equated 'Yadav', a community and caste-identifying title, with 'Love Story', implying illegal and illicit relations representing moral turpitude. The petition sought direction restraining the release, screening or broadcast of the film and a direction to the CBFC to re-examine its content in accordance with constitutional principles and statutory guidelines.

It also sought a stay on the release and public exhibition of the film and a direction to the producer to change the title and remove any reference to the Yadav caste/community from the film.

The counsel said that the film had not been released and sought permission to approach the court if something in the film hurt the sentiments of the public after its release. —*PTI*

PLEAS AGAINST 'THE KERALA STORY 2' MISCONCEIVED: PRODUCER TO KERALA HC

KOCHI, 25 FEB

The producer of 'The Kerala Story 2 - Goes Beyond' has told the Kerala High Court that the pleas opposing the film's release were "premature, misconceived and not maintainable".

The submission was made by the film's producer, Vipul Amrutlal Shah in an affidavit filed in the High Court on 24 February.

Shah also contended that the Central Board of Film Certification was the sole expert authority to examine films in their entirety and certify them for public exhibition.

He has also denied the allegations against the movie and termed them as "an abuse and misuse of the process of law".

Shah has claimed that the plea by the first petitioner -- Sreedev Namboodiri of Kannavam in Kannur district was filed "with a malafide intention and an ulterior motive to gain financial benefits from him".

The teasers of the film were released 16 days before the filing of the plea.

The exhibition of a certified film cannot be restrained on the basis of a teaser alone, without viewing the film, he said.

The three separate pleas have sought to quash the certificate for public viewing granted to 'The Kerala Story 2 - Goes Beyond', which is scheduled to be released on February 27. —*PTI*

Water contamination kills 1 in Andhra, 70 hospitalised

SRIKAKULAM, 25 FEB

One person died and more than 70 people were hospitalised after allegedly drinking contaminated water in Srikakulam district, prompting the authorities to initiate emergency measures.

On 22 January, several residents of Dammala Veedi in Srikakulam town suffered mild diarrhoea, following which surveillance and sanitation drives were intensified in the locality.

Water and other required samples will be collected and tested to ascertain the exact cause of the outbreak, Srikakulam district medical and health officer (DMHO) K Anitha said.

A door-to-door screening is underway in the affected area and treatment is being provided on the spot in minor cases.

Patients with severe symptoms are being shifted to the nearest medical camps and hospitals.

Over 70 people are undergoing treatment in various hospitals. The pipeline in the entire colony has been shut down and safe drinking water is being supplied through tankers and alternative arrangements.

The Health Department will collect the samples of water for tests to ascertain the exact cause of the outbreak—*REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE*

Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu reviewed the situation with senior Health Department officials and district authorities.

Naidu enquired about the health condition of those undergoing treatment and directed to prioritise the critically ill patients.

He also instructed officials to ensure seamless coordination between various departments to prevent future recurrences.

YSRCP supremo YS Jagan Mohan Reddy expressed grave concern over the situation in Srikakulam, where several people are undergoing treatment in hospitals following suspected water contamination.

He criticised the state government for its "administrative failure" and demanded special care for those on ventilator support.

The Srikakulam incident comes close on the heels of the Rajamahendravaram milk contamination tragedy. —*PTI*

Mere breakup not enough for abetting suicide: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The Delhi High Court has held that merely ending a relationship does not necessarily amount to instigation under the law on abetment of suicide.

Justice Manoj Jain made the observation while hearing a bail plea by a man accused of abetting the suicide of his former partner, who hanged herself five days after he married another woman.

The court noted that instigation must be such that the deceased had no choice but to take their life.

In this case, there was no dying declaration, and the couple had been together for around eight years without complaints from the deceased.

The court observed a significant gap between the end of their communication and the suicide, stating it appeared to be a broken relationship, with the deceased possibly choosing to end her life after learning of the accused's marriage.

The deceased's father alleged she had been pressured to convert for marriage, leading to her suicide. The accused, arrested in 2025, was granted bail on a personal bond and a Rs 25,000 surety. —*PTI*

NAVY TO COMMISSION 'DOLPHIN HUNTER'

India is set to bolster its coastal defence with the commissioning of its third Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft, INS Anjadip. Named after Anjadip Island off Karwar and dubbed the 'Dolphin Hunter', the vessel will enhance maritime security along the Tamil Nadu coast. Here are the details.

Will be commissioned on **27 February** | Location: **Chennai Port**

KEY FEATURES

Length: 77m | **Top Speed:** 25 knots

- High-speed water-jet system propulsion.
- Will be operational in coastal & shallow waters.
- The sub is nicknamed 'Dolphin Hunter' as it will: Detect enemy submarines and track underwater threats to neutralise them.

DESIGNED BY: SURENDAR.R

THE WEAPONS IT WILL CARRY

- Indigenous hull-mounted sonar Abhay.
- Lightweight Torpedoes.
- Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Rockets.
- Advanced ASW weapons & sensor package

VIDEO GOES VIRAL

U'khand Muslim man beaten for offering namaz near temple

RUDRAPUR, 25 FEB

An elderly Muslim man was allegedly assaulted and forced to chant religious slogans after offering namaz on a vacant plot opposite the Atriya Temple in Jagatpura, police have said.

A video of the incident, now circulating on social media, appears to show several men beating the victim with sticks and verbally abusing him. The man, identified as Shahid from the Resham Bari area, had been working near the site for several days. He said the land on which he offered prayers during the holy month of Ramzan was some distance from the temple premises.

Members of the Muslim community later accompanied Shahid to the local police station, where a formal complaint was lodged. They alleged that one of the accused is a murder convict currently out on parole.

Temple manager Arvind Sharma stated that activities linked to any other religion would not be permitted on temple land, even if a case were filed against him.

Police said officers were dispatched to the scene and urged both communities to maintain calm. Shahid was sent for a medical examination, and officials confirmed that legal action would follow based on the complaint. Local leaders condemned the attack, calling for an investigation and strict action to safeguard communal harmony. —*PTI*

ED attaches Anil Ambani's house

PANAJI, 25 FEB

The Enforcement Directorate attached Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani's Mumbai house, 'Abode', worth Rs 3,716 crore under the anti-money laundering law.

The luxurious house, which is 66-metre high with 17 floors, is located in the Pali Hill area of Mumbai.

A provisional order has been issued to attach the multi-storeyed house in the case linked to an alleged bank fraud by his group company Reliance Communications (RCOM), according to the sources.

They said the attached asset's value is Rs 3,716.83 crore.

Ambani, 66, is expected to appear before the federal probe agency here for his second round of questioning. He first deposed before the ED in August 2025 and had his statement recorded under the PMLA.

The total value of the attachment in this case stands at about Rs 15,700 crore. —*PTI*

Record Rs 4.27 cr cash seized from Odisha govt officer's home

BHUBANESWAR, 25 FEB

Stacks of notes packed in trolley bags, totaling over Rs 4.27 crore, were allegedly recovered from the house of an Odisha Mines Department officer, who was arrested in a corruption case, officials said on Wednesday.

The cash was seized from the Bhubaneswar flat of Deputy Director of Mines Debabrata Mohanty, arrested by the state Vigilance Department on Tuesday night, they said.

Vigilance Director Yeshwant Jethwa said this is the highest-ever cash seized by the anti-corruption agency in the state.

Bhubaneswar division's Vigilance SP Saroj Kumar Samal said that so far, cash worth Rs 4.27 crore has been counted.

"Mohanty was booked in a similar corruption case in 2009, and the trial against him is still going on at a court in Mayurbhanj district," he added.

Attacking the ruling BJP, state Congress president Bhakta Charan Das alleged that the recovery of the cash exposed the staggering scale of corruption flourishing right under the watch "of the so-called double-engine government" in the state. —*PTI*

A huge pile of currency notes recoved at the residence of an officer of the Mines Department in Bhubaneswar in Odisha on Wednesday —*PTI*

CRITICALLY INJURED

Jilted lover shoots bride on wedding stage

BUXAR, 25 FEB

An 18-year-old bride has been shot during her varmala (exchange of garlands) ceremony in Chausa in Buxar district in Bihar on 24 February.

She is undergoing treatment and is on ventilator support at a hospital in Varanasi.

The incident occurred at Mallah Tola in Chausa Nagar Panchayat. Aarti Kumari, daughter of Nandji Mallah, was on stage exchanging garlands with the groom when she was shot in the abdomen by a masked man.

Eyewitnesses said the man suddenly climbed onto the stage and opened fire. Though the loud music in the background initially masked the gunshot, panic ensued when Aarti collapsed moments later. She began bleeding from the wound.

The accused had reportedly harassed the groom's family after the marriage had been fixed—*SCREENGRAB*

She was first taken to Sadar Hospital in Buxar and later referred to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh due to her critical condition.

Before being shifted, Aarti allegedly named the attacker, telling family members that "Deenbandhu shot me."

Family members alleged that the accused, Deenbandhu, is a neighbour who was involved in a one-sided relationship with the victim. Aarti did not reciprocate his feelings for her. Her marriage had been arranged with a man from Ballia district in Uttar Pradesh.

Locals said the accused had allegedly been pursuing Aarti for nearly two years. They further claimed that after her marriage was fixed, he harassed the groom's family, leading to the cancellation of a previous wedding arrangement.

However, Deenbandhu's father, Ramashankar Chaudhary, said he was unaware of any alleged relationship between his son and the victim.

A probe is underway and a manhunt was launched to trace the accused. —*PTI*

IIM Nagpur students boycott exam over disciplinary action

NAGPUR, 25 FEB

Nearly 300 first-year MBA students at Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Nagpur have boycotted their mid-term exam, protesting the debarment of 40 classmates who had attended a farewell party in violation of the institute's rules.

IIM Official on Wednesday said that as many as 75 students from the first and second-year batches went to a farewell party organised for seniors on the night of 21 February without permission and returned to their hostel on the B-school campus the next morning.

These students should have returned by 10 pm, but they came late. They also did not inform their parents about being late, the official said.

Since they violated the rules, the institution took action against 40 first-year students who went out and debarred them from their mid-term examination, which was scheduled on Tuesday, he said.

However, around 300 first-year students, including the 40 debarred, staged a 'silent protest' in the institute against the action and did not appear for the exam, the official said. Some second-year students who had gone to the farewell party also participated in the protest.

The institute's director was out of town when this issue occurred, an official said.

The issue has now been resolved, and the second-year MBA students appeared for their end-term exam on Wednesday, he said.

The examination for the 300 first-year students who had boycotted it will be held on a later date. —*PTI*

MODI-BIBI FRIENDSHIP AND THE GAZA SHADOW

PM Narendra Modi was among the first world leaders to condemn the 7 October 2023 attacks, and expressed solidarity with Israel. India has repeatedly called for a two-state solution but has resolutely refused to condemn Israel's genocide in Gaza —*PTI/NPR*

AMINA AFAQ

Thirty-eight years after becoming one of the first non-Arab nations to recognise Palestine, India's West Asia policy faces renewed scrutiny. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives in Israel for a two-day visit beginning 25 February, the symbolism is inescapable. The trip unfolds as Israel confronts mounting international pressure and allegations of war crimes and genocide over its devastating campaign in Gaza.

Modi is scheduled to address the Knesset, meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv and travel onwards to Jerusalem for high-level engagements. For Netanyahu, beleaguered at home and abroad, the visit is being hailed as "historic". For Modi, it reaffirms a relationship he has methodically elevated since taking office in 2014. Globally, however, the optics are fraught: the leader of the world's largest democracy appearing alongside a government accused before international courts of genocide.

THE FALLEN WALL

This is Modi's second visit to Israel. His first, in July 2017, was itself unprecedented — the first ever by an Indian prime minister. The images were carefully choreographed: Netanyahu greeting him at Ben Gurion airport, the two men embracing on the tarmac, later walking barefoot along a Mediterranean beach inspecting a desalination plant. Modi called it a "path-breaking journey", and the pair pledged to "break down the remaining walls" between their nations.

Nine years on, those walls have fallen. What was once discreet and low-profile has become one of India's most publicly celebrated partnerships abroad. Modi has repeatedly referred to Netanyahu as a "dear friend," even in the wake of the International Criminal Court issuing an arrest warrant against the Israeli prime minister in late 2024 over alleged war crimes in Gaza.

However, the situation today is dramatically different from 2017. Since the Hamas-led attacks of 7 October 2023, Israel's military action has reduced Gaza to rubble. More than 70,000 people, including women and children, are reported to have been killed over two years of bombardment. Aid agencies describe catastrophic humanitarian conditions; experts warn the true toll may be far higher, with many buried beneath collapsed buildings. Images of starving children circulate widely online, fuelling protests and intensifying legal scrutiny of Israel's conduct.

THE CRITICISM

Against this backdrop, Modi's presence in Jerusalem risks being read as political endorsement. A parliamentary panel in India has reportedly questioned the timing of the visit, citing volatile regional tensions and a visible United States military build-up in West Asia. Opposition leaders, particularly from the Congress party, accuse the government of abandoning Palestine. Jairam Ramesh, the party's communications chief, has called the trip "cynical and hypocritical".

Controversy extends to Israel itself. Modi's address to the Knesset has become entangled in domestic political disputes, with sections of the opposition threatening a boycott unless Supreme Court President Isaac Amit is invited, amid tensions over judicial reforms. The Speaker has reportedly considered inviting former lawmakers to fill potential empty seats. Yet for all the criticism, the visit reflects a long-term strategic calculation in New Delhi.

FROM PALESTINE TO PARTNERSHIP

India opposed the United Nations' 1947 partition plan for Palestine and recognised the Palestinian state in 1988, becoming one of the first non-Arab countries to do so. For decades, New Delhi was a staunch advocate of Palestinian self-determination, rooted in its leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement and its post-colonial solidarity politics. Even before independence, Mahatma Gandhi criticised the "imposition of Jews over Arabs" through the creation of Israel. The end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalisation triggered a recalibration. As New Delhi drew closer to Washington, it also formalised ties with Israel. Diplomatic relations were established in 1992, and defence ties were central to the bilateral trade. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, India accounted for 34 per cent of Israel's defence exports between 2020 and 2024, purchasing an estimated $20.5 billion worth of military equipment. Since 2014, India has become Israel's largest weapons customer. In 2024, as Israel prosecuted its war in Gaza, Indian firms Munitions India and Premier Explosives Ltd reportedly supplied rockets and explosives.

Cooperation has since broadened. Bilateral trade, excluding defence, peaked at $10.77 billion in 2022–23. India is now Israel's second-largest Asian trading partner in goods after China, with commerce dominated by diamonds, petroleum and chemicals. The two sides signed a Bilateral Investment Treaty last year and continue negotiations on a free trade agreement. The relationship spans innovation, cyber security, agriculture, water technology, space cooperation and counter-terrorism.

CALL FOR 2 STATES

Modi was among the first world leaders to condemn the 7 October attacks and express solidarity with Israel. Since then, while India has reiterated calls for dialogue and a two-state solution, it has avoided direct criticism of Israel's conduct in Gaza. In 2025, India hosted Israeli minister Bezalel Smotrich despite European bans over his inflammatory remarks and support for settlement expansion.

After Israel barred Palestinian workers following the October 2023 attacks, thousands of Indians reportedly applied for construction jobs there.

Still, this visit carries heavier implications than any before it. Netanyahu's government faces domestic anger over intelligence failures linked to 7 October and over efforts to curb judicial independence. Internationally, Israel confronts legal challenges and deepening diplomatic isolation. Modi's arrival offers Netanyahu a potent image: a major Global South leader standing beside him as others hesitate. For India, the calculation is more complex. It seeks to project itself as a voice of the Global South and a champion of a rules-based international order, even as it defends "strategic autonomy" in foreign policy. Balancing deepening ties with Israel against historical commitments to Palestine — and against global outrage over Gaza — will test that posture. When Modi steps up to the Knesset podium, the applause may echo far beyond Jerusalem. Whether it resonates as "pragmatic statecraft" or moral abdication will depend on who is listening.

—*Salar News*

SALAR سالار

eVisas must for Indians as UK travel system goes digital

New rules in force from Wednesday will see the UK transition to a digital transit system, including mandatory eVisas for Indian travellers and Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) for non-visa requiring visitors.

The new procedure will replace paper-based visa stickers as part of a phased programme over recent years. While the new system will still involve a physical visit to the application centre for biometric registration, it will do away with the need to leave behind the passport document during the processing period.

"I'd urge anyone wanting to travel to the UK to ensure they are travel-ready and have the right permission, to make their journey much smoother," said Mike Tapp, UK Minister for Migration and Citizenship.

It will be mandatory for visitors to the UK to have obtained digital permission to travel, which means airlines can prevent passengers from boarding planes if they do not have an eVisa, ETA or other valid documentation.

The UK government had launched the eVisa system last year, with physical documents being accepted during the transition phase up until this week.

"An eVisa cannot be lost, stolen or tampered with, and allows visa holders to instantly and securely prove their immigration rights. Switching won't change, impact or remove a customer's current rights or immigration status," the Home Office said at the time.

As part of the plans to fully digitise the UK border and immigration system, all those using a physical biometric residence permit (BRP), a passport containing a visa vignette sticker or ink stamp confirming their "indefinite leave to enter/remain" in the country, or biometric residence card (BRC) as evidence of their immigration rights have been switched over to an entirely online UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) system.

The Home Office said it has been phasing out physical documents for several years through this transition to eVisas, with over 10 million issued to date.

All eVisa holders, including those with EU Settlement Scheme status, need to keep their UKVI account up to date with their most recent passport details to avoid travel disruption, it said.

Visitors of 85 nationalities, including nationals of the United States, Canada and France, who do not require visas, are now legally required to have an ETA when travelling to the UK.

An ETA costs 16 pounds, permits multiple journeys, and lasts for two years or until the holder's passport expires – whichever is sooner.

"The ETA scheme is a vital part of our work to strengthen the UK's border security, helping to deliver a more efficient and modern service that works for both visitors and the British public," said Minister Tapp.

The Home Office said the UK's cost of an ETA is competitive and in line with other countries, including the US ESTA, which costs 40 dollars and the European Union's (EU) ETIAS, which is expected to cost 20 euros when it is implemented.

British and Irish citizens, including dual citizens, are exempt from needing an ETA but will be required to present either a valid British passport or Certificate of Entitlement when travelling to the UK.

"This is the same approach taken by other countries, including the US, Australia and Canada. At their own discretion, carriers may accept some expired British passports as alternative documentation," the Home Office said.

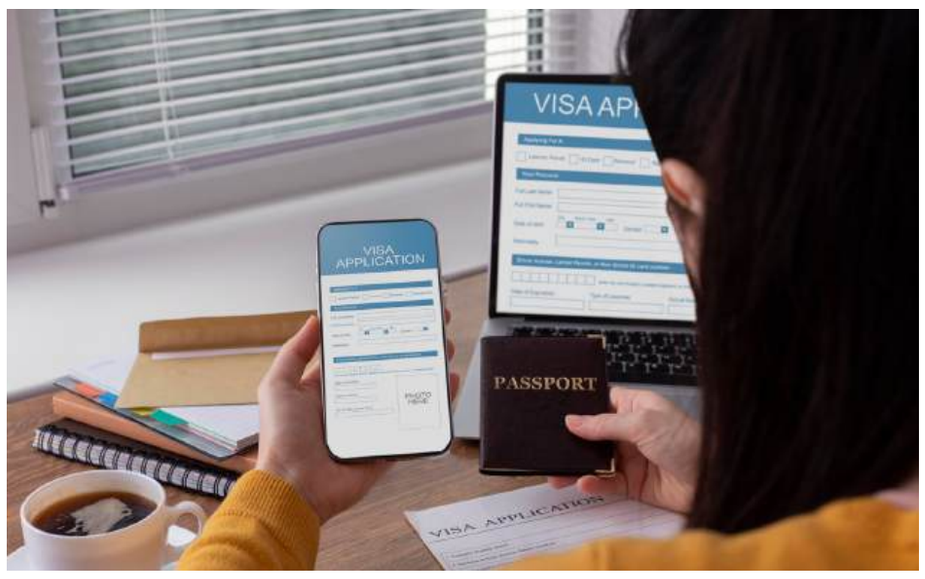
ETAs are also mandatory for visitors who travel to the UK to take connecting flights and go through passport control.

According to official data, since ETA was introduced in October 2023, over 19 million visitors have successfully applied, and over 383 million pounds in revenue have been raised to be reinvested in the UK's border and immigration system.

Starting Thursday, "Certificates of Entitlement" will be issued in digital format, which means that a certificate only needs to be applied for once, rather than expiring with passports.

"The enforcement of the ETA scheme is a significant step towards digitising the immigration system and paves the way for a contactless UK border in the future. The scheme also helps to keep the border secure, preventing individuals who pose a threat from entering the UK," the Home Office stated. "Applying for an ETA through the UK ETA app is quick and easy, and the vast majority of applicants currently receive a decision automatically within minutes, ensuring that spontaneous trips to the UK remain possible.

"However, it is still recommended that visitors allow up to three working days before they plan to travel to receive their decision in time and, to account for the small number of cases that require additional review," it added. ETA applicants are also required to provide their biographic and biometric details and answer a few questions on suitability and criminality before the authorisation is digitally linked to their passport. —*PTI*



The new system replaces paper visa stickers, allowing biometric registration without surrendering the passport during processing —*FREEPIK*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

US forces Anthropic to let military use its AI tech as it sees fit

The Pentagon has given Anthropic, the AI company behind the chatbot Claude, a firm deadline to open its technology for unrestricted military use or risk losing its government contract, according to sources familiar with a Tuesday meeting. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth reportedly told CEO Dario Amodei that the company must comply by Friday, highlighting the growing tension over artificial intelligence in national security.

Anthropic is the last major AI developer not supplying its technology to a new US military internal network. Amodei has consistently expressed ethical concerns about fully autonomous military drones and AI-assisted domestic surveillance, warning of the risks posed by AI systems that can act without human oversight.

According to sources, defence officials warned Anthropic it could be designated a supply chain risk or have the Pentagon invoke the Defence Production Act, granting broader authority to use its products even without the company's approval. While the tone of the meeting was reportedly cordial, Amodei refused to compromise on two lines the company will not cross: fully autonomous military targeting and domestic surveillance of US citizens.

The Pentagon, however, objects to these ethical limits. A senior official said military operations require AI tools without built-in restrictions, stressing that any legal use of the systems remains the responsibility of the armed forces.

The standoff underscores a broader debate over AI in national security, particularly regarding lethal operations, sensitive intelligence, and government surveillance. Hegseth has also framed the issue as part of his campaign to root out what he calls "woke culture" in the military. In a January essay, Amodei warned that "a powerful AI looking across billions of conversations could gauge public sentiment, detect pockets of disloyalty forming, and stamp them out before they grow."

Anthropic is no stranger to government scrutiny. It was the first AI company approved to work on classified military networks, partnering with firms such as Palantir. The Pentagon announced last summer that four AI firms — Anthropic, Google, OpenAI, and Elon Musk's xAI — would receive contracts of up to USD 200 million each. Musk's xAI, which operates the Grok chatbot, is also preparing to support classified settings.

Hegseth has emphasised that military AI systems must operate "without ideological constraints that limit lawful military applications," adding that the Pentagon's AI will "not be woke." Grok is already integrated into GenAI.mil, the Pentagon's secure but unclassified AI network, despite recent controversies over Grok generating highly sexualised deepfake images. OpenAI is also joining GenAI.mil, enabling service members to use a custom ChatGPT for unclassified tasks.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth had summoned Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei to the Pentagon on Tuesday —*ANI*

Anthropic, by contrast, has long presented itself as the safety-conscious option in AI. Founded in 2021 by former OpenAI executives, the company has prioritised ethical safeguards, voluntary third-party audits, and limitations on high-risk applications. A statement after Tuesday's meeting noted that Anthropic "continued good-faith conversations about our usage policy to ensure [we] can support the government's national security mission in line with what our models can reliably and responsibly do."

Experts warn that the company's stance could limit its influence in Washington. Owen Daniels, associate director of analysis at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology, said, "Anthropic's peers, including Meta, Google, and xAI, have been willing to comply with the department's policy on using models for all lawful applications. So the company's bargaining power is limited, and it risks losing influence in the Pentagon's push to adopt AI."

Amodei has repeatedly cautioned about the catastrophic potential of AI while rejecting the label of "doomer." In a January essay, he wrote that the risks of 2026 are "considerably closer" than in 2023 but can be managed pragmatically. The company's approach contrasts with some government officials seeking immediate, unrestricted deployment in combat and surveillance contexts. Anthropic's advocacy for safeguards has also put it at odds with the Trump administration. The company publicly criticised proposals to loosen export controls on AI chips to sell to China and engaged in lobbying for AI regulation at the state level. Trump advisers accused the company of "regulatory capture based on fear-mongering," while Anthropic maintained its partnership with Nvidia and expanded its board with figures from both parties, including former Trump official Chris Liddell.

The push for rapid AI adoption in the military has renewed calls for congressional oversight. Amos Toh, senior counsel at the Brennan Center for Liberty and National Security, highlighted the risks if AI is used to surveil Americans: "The law is not keeping up with how quickly the technology is evolving. But that doesn't mean the Department of Defence has a blank check."

The situation places Anthropic's safety-first ethos under intense pressure. With Friday's deadline looming, the company faces a choice: comply with military demands, potentially breaching its ethical commitments, or risk losing its foothold in classified networks as peers like OpenAI, xAI, and Google move forward. —*PTI*

Trump honours Chief involved in Maduro raid

WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

During his State of the Union address, US President Trump honoured two service members. Army Chief Warrant Officer 5 Eric Slover received the Medal of Honor for his role in the 3 January raid that captured former Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. Despite being shot four times, Slover successfully manoeuvred his CH-47 Chinook under intense fire, preventing a crash and ensuring the mission's success. Air Force Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe was awarded the Purple Heart. Wolfe survived a near-fatal head wound during a November National Guard patrol in Washington—an ambush that claimed the life of Specialist Sarah Beckstrom. The alleged attacker, an Afghan national from Operation Allies Welcome, remains in custody.—*PTI*

Imran must be shifted for health: PTI moves SC

ISLAMABAD, 25 FEB

Incarcerated former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's party has moved the Supreme Court of Pakistan seeking transfer from Adiala Jail to a private facility for specialist eye treatment. His party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), filed the petition after a court-directed medical assessment. Khan, 73, has been diagnosed with right central retinal vein occlusion, affecting his vision. On Tuesday, he was taken to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) for a second anti-VEGF injection before being returned to prison. The plea seeks his immediate transfer to Shifa International Hospital, access to his personal doctors, family presence during examinations, and copies of medical reports for his legal team. Khan has been jailed since August 2023.—*PTI*

25 killed, 45 missing in Brazil after mass floods

JUIZ DE FORA, 25 FEB

Severe floods in south-eastern Brazil have estimatedly killed 25 people and left 43 missing in the state of Minas Gerais, officials said on Tuesday. The downpours began on Monday in Juiz de Fora and Ubá, about 310km north of Rio de Janeiro, forcing around 440 residents to evacuate. Streets were submerged after a river burst its banks, and at least 20 landslides were reported. Juiz de Fora recorded double its usual February rainfall, said local authorities. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said security forces are conducting rescue operations and providing emergency assistance. Brazil's meteorology institute warned that more rain could worsen conditions in the hilly region. —*PTI*

American deported after 11 year jail sentence in Bali

JAKARTA, 25 FEB

Indonesia has freed and deported an American man after he spent 11 years in prison for the premeditated murder of his girlfriend's mother in the notorious Bali "suitcase murder" case. Tommy Schaefer was sentenced to 18 years for the 2014 killing of Sheila von Wiese-Mack at the luxury St. Regis Bali Resort. The 62-year-old Chicago socialite was found beaten to death, her body stuffed into a suitcase placed in the boot of a taxi outside the hotel. He was deported to the United States after receiving remissions for good behaviour, Indonesian immigration officials said. Heather Mack, who was 19 and pregnant at the time, served seven years of a 10-year sentence in Indonesia. She was later jailed for 26 years in Chicago in 2024 after pleading guilty to helping kill her mother. —*PTI*

President Donald Trump delivers the State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress in the House chamber at the US Capitol in Washington —*PTI*

Tariffs will replace income tax: Trump

In longest speech in Cong, Don says 'US is winning'

WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

US President Donald Trump said the US is "winning so much" that they don't even know what to do, during a marathon State of the Union (SOTU) speech on Tuesday.

He credited himself for revitalising a "stagnant" economy, slammed the recent US Supreme Court ruling on tariffs, lauded his immigration policies and said he should be in his third term in a 1 hour 48 minutes speech, the longest SOTU address.

ECONOMY

Describing Supreme Court ruling that overturned tariffs declared under an emergency act as "unfortunate", Trump said the levies were "saving our country".

Tariffs would soon replace income tax, he said, claiming that US was the "hottest" country right now.

Trump said he found a "fully approved and tested alternative legal statutes" to impose 10 per cent tariffs on all countries adding that "congressional action will not be necessary" to keep the tariffs in place.

Trump argued that the tariffs are paid by foreign countries. despite evidence that the costs are borne by American consumers and businesses.

Yet, Trump claimed that the economy was "roaring" and blamed former president Joe Biden for the affordability crisis. Trump claimed that his administration was fixing it, pointing to a growing stock market and petrol prices.

IRAN AND VENEZUELA

Trump said he would prefer a diplomatic solution to the tensions with Iran, but did not shy away from military threats.

"I will never allow the world's number one sponsor of terror, which they are by far, to have a nuclear weapon," Trump said. He reiterated that 32,000 people were killed during the Iran protester crackdown in January.

He recounted US airstrikes last summer that pounded Tehran's nuclear capabilities, and lauded the US military operation that ousted Venezuelan president Nicholas Maduro.

POLITICALLY CRUCIAL SPEECH

Trump's address came as his approval ratings have hover at the lowest they've been since he took office for his second term. It also came ahead of the crucial November midterm.

Trump navigated this by lauding his crackdown on immigration, saying foreign criminals have been expelled, but remained silent on the ICE crackdown in Minnesota – a topic that has increasingly alienated the American public. He also did not mention Greenland or dwell on the Russia-Ukraine war.

Trump also claimed that electoral fraud was rampant in the US and quipped that he should be in his third term now.

DATA CENTRES

Trump said that tech firms in artificial intelligence are agreeing to pay higher electricity rates in areas where their data centres are located. Data centres tend to use large volumes of electricity, potentially increasing the cost of power to other consumers in the area. —*AGENCIES*

New Dalilah law to prevent 'illegal aliens' from trucking

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

Trump honoured a young girl who suffered life-altering injuries in a multi-vehicle crash caused by an illegal Indian truck driver, during his address. The Dalilah Law proposes to bar any state from issuing commercial driving licences to 'illegal aliens'.

Dalilah Coleman was only five years old in June 2024 when an 18-wheel tractor-trailer travelling at 60 miles an hour rammed into her stationary car.

Trump blamed former president Joe Biden for letting the accused, Partap Singh, into the country.

"She wouldn't even be able to eat again. But against all odds, she is now in the first grade, learning to walk, You are a great inspiration," he said.

Trump said that many "illegal aliens" do not know English and cannot read signage.

"That's why tonight I'm calling on Congress to pass what we will call the Dalilah Law barring any state from granting commercial driver's licenses to illegal aliens," he said.

This is likely to impact Indian immigrants, who form a bulk of the US truck driving populace, but have been involved in several high-profile crashes in America. —*PTI*

Five-year-old Dalilah Coleman was injured when an Indian trucker crashed into a stationary car in 2022 —*x*

US military surge & CIA ops shadow approaching Iran talks

TEL AVIV/ WASHINGTON/DUBAI, 25 FEB

A dozen US F-22 stealth fighters have landed at an Israeli airbase in southern Israel, the latest addition to America's largest military build-up in the Middle East in decades.

Dozens of additional aircraft — F-35s, F-15s, and F-16s — have also been tracked to the region. Satellite imagery shows US Navy vessels normally docked in Bahrain have scattered to sea, mirroring movements seen ahead of Iran's attack on Qatar in June.

UPCOMING PEACE TALKS

The US and Iran are due to meet on Thursday in Geneva for a third round of nuclear talks mediated by Oman. In his State of the Union address, US President Donald Trump said his preference is diplomacy but vowed he would "never allow the world's number one sponsor of terror to have a nuclear weapon."

Iranian officials have alternated between calling Trump's remarks "big lies" and expressing openness to an agreement through "honourable diplomacy." Israeli officials, however, believe a US strike is inevitable, with one calling a diplomatic resolution the "surprise of the year."

Trump claimed 32,000 people were killed in January's Iranian protests. The US-based Human Rights Activist News Agency has counted over 7,000 confirmed deaths and believes the real figure is higher. Iran's government put the toll at 3,117.

In response, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei compared Trump to Joseph Goebbels, Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister. He accused Trump and his administration of conducting a "disinformation & misinformation campaign" against Iran.

CIA FARSI OPS

US' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has launched a Farsi recruitment drive on X, Instagram and YouTube, sharing encrypted contact instructions for potential sources inside Iran. Director John Ratcliffe said it is "having an impact," as student protests resume in Tehran.

By offering secure, Farsi-language guidance on encrypted, untraceable channels — including VPNs and burner devices — the CIA aims to exploit internal dissent while evading government surveillance. —*AGENCIES*

Dozens of US F-22 stealth fighters have landed at an Israeli base as tensions mount between Washington and Tehran —*X@SENTDEFENDER*

States sue Trump admin for vaccine rollbacks

SACRAMENTO, 25 FEB

Over a dozen states have sued the Trump administration for its rollback of childhood vaccine recommendations.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last month rescinded universal immunisation recommendations for flu, rotavirus, hepatitis A and B, RSV, and meningitis. Limiting protections

to "high risk" groups or cases where doctors recommend them through "shared decision-making."

The lawsuit alleges the new recommendations ignore long-standing medical guidance, were shaped by an unlawfully reconstituted advisory committee — after Kennedy ousted every existing member and replaced them with his own picks — and will force states to increase spending to prevent potential outbreaks.

The suit follows California, Washington, and Oregon, forming an alliance to set their own vaccine guidance. While states control school vaccine mandates, CDC guidance shapes their rules.

The Trump administration has also laid off thousands of public health workers, cut scientific research funding, and altered government guidance on fluoride along with other topics. —*PTI*

IRS CAN SHARE IMMIGRANTS' TAX DATA WITH ICE

A Washington, DC, federal court on Tuesday rejected a request from an immigrant rights group Centro de Trabajadores Unidos, and other non-profits to temporarily block the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) from sharing certain taxpayer data such as their names and addresses that could make it easier for Immigration and Customs

Enforcement to identify and deport people living illegally in the US. —*PTI*

Russia probes Telegram for terroism

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON, 25 FEB

Pavel Durov, founder of Telegram, has revealed that Russian authorities have opened a criminal investigation against him for "aiding terrorism". Born in Russia, Durov accused Moscow of fabricating pretexts to restrict access to Telegram, framing the move as an attempt to suppress privacy and speech.

The investigation follows action by Roskomnadzor, which recently limited access to the app, claiming Telegram refused to comply with Russian law. The restrictions sparked rare public protests. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has increasingly controlled digital communications, restricting platforms such as YouTube, Signal, Viber and WhatsApp features, Telegram, and Apple's FaceTime, while promoting the state-backed MAX, raising surveillance concerns.

Meanwhile, the US Department of State expressed concern over Ukraine's attacks on the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, which hurt US oil interests. Ambassador Olga Stefanishyna stressed the concern was economic, not political. The port handles ewhere Chevron and ExxonMobil hold stakes.

In ongoing US-brokered talks, Vladimir Putin insists Kyiv withdraw from annexed regions, with US President Donald Trump claiming Russia's victory as being "inevitable". —*PTI*

GERMAN CHANCELLOR IN CHINA, TO PITCH FOR 'FAIR' PARTNERSHIP

BEIJING, 25 FEB

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz is meeting China's top leaders on Wednesday at the start of a whirlwind two-day visit to press for a fair economic playing field for German companies, and China's assistance in bringing about an end to Russia's four-year-old war in Ukraine.

The German leader's plane touched down in the late morning on an overcast day in the Chinese capital.

Before his departure, he emphasised the importance of placing Germany's China policy in a European context, saying it was no coincidence that he is visiting not long after French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer — and ahead of a planned trip by US President Donald Trump in early April.

"Our message from a European point of view is the same: We want a partnership with China balanced, reliable, regulated and fair," Merz said. "This is our offer. At the same time, it is what we also hope for and expect from the Chinese side."

Merz is making his first trip to China since taking office last May. —*PTI*

SL ex-intel chief held for 2019 Easter attack

COLOMBO, 25 FEB

Sri Lanka's former state intelligence service chief Suresh Sally was arrested on Wednesday in connection with the 2019 Easter bombings, police sources said.

Sally was arrested by police's Crime Investigation Department in the Colombo suburb of Peliyagoda while on his way to work in a non-governmental organisation, they said.

The arrest is linked to the 2019 co-ordinated Easter

Suresh Sallay arrested for Easter Sunday attacks that killed over 270 people. —*x*

Sunday bombings, which killed 270 people, including 11 Indians, across churches and five-star hotels in Colombo, according to the sources.

Sallay was serving in a diplomatic position overseas when the attacks took place. A retired Major General, he had headed the state intelligence service under the Rajapaksa government before 2015.

The coordinated attacks were carried out by a local militant group. There were allegations that the defence establishment had prior intelligence about the impending attacks, including warnings shared by India, but failed to act in time. —*PTI*

US to offer consular services at Israeli settlement in W Bank

JERUSALEM, 25 FEB

The US embassy in Jerusalem plans to offer consular services for the first time at an Israeli settlement in the occupied West Bank.

A statement posted Wednesday to the US embassy's account on the social platform X said consular officers "will be providing routine passport services" to US citizens Friday in the West Bank settlement of Efrat. The embassy said a similar outreach service is planned in the coming months in the Israeli settlement of Beitar Illit, calling the services part of its "efforts to reach all Americans."

The US embassy has previously provided consular services in Ramallah and other Palestinian cities in the West Bank.

The move continues a shift in policy under US President Donald Trump's administration, which has been far friendlier to Israeli settlements in the West Bank than past US presidents.

"We welcome the historic decision by the US embassy in Jerusalem to extend consular services to American citizens in Judea and Samaria," Israel's Foreign Ministry said on X.

There was no immediate comment from Palestinian officials. —*PTI*

OVER EPSTEIN TIES

Bill says sorry to Gates Foundation

NEW YORK, 25 FEB

American tech entrepreneur **Bill Gates** apologised to the Gates Foundation staff for his ties with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Despite this, he reportedly maintains that he did and saw "nothing illicit".

In a Tuesday report by The Wall Street Journal, the Microsoft co-founder admitted to two extramarital affairs—one with a Russian bridge player and another with an employee—acknowledging these "mistakes" cast a shadow over his philanthropic foundation's work. "It was a huge mistake to bring Foundation executives into meetings with the sex offender, Bill said.

While Bill admitted that Epstein later discovered these relationships, he emphasised they did not involve Epstein's victims. "I did nothing illicit. I saw nothing illicit," he insisted.

The Wall Street Journal further said that Bill told staff on Tuesday that he continued meeting with Epstein through 2014, flew on a private jet with Epstein and spent time with him in Germany, France, New York and Washington. "I never stayed overnight," he said, or visited Epstein's island. Bill said that 2014 was the last year he met with Epstein.

The philanthropist said he had met Epstein in 2011, three years after the sex offender had pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting a minor for prostitution.

Bill said he didn't "properly check" Epstein's background even when he was aware of some "18-month thing" that had limited Epstein's travel and added that he continued meeting with Epstein even after his then-wife, Melinda French Gates, expressed concerns in 2013.

Speaking of his ex-wife, he added: "To give her credit, she was always kind of skeptical about the Epstein thing."

Last month, the US Justice Department released the 'Epstein files, ' a collection of tens of thousands of documents, including emails and call logs.

These records link Bill to the sex offender alongside scores of other prominent leaders, celebrities, entrepreneurs and politicians.

—*PTI*

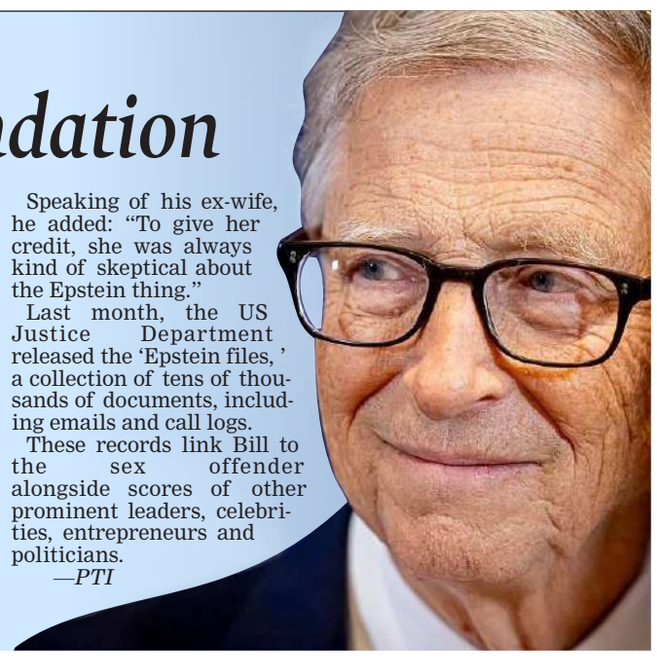


PHOTO: FREEPIK

Silver, gold rise as amid demand for safe-haven

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Precious metal prices increased up to 2 per cent in the national capital on Wednesday, with silver rising to Rs 2.77 lakh per kilogram, and gold advancing to Rs 1.64 lakh per 10g, tracking strong global trends and sustained safe-haven buying. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal jumped Rs 5,900, or 2 per cent, to Rs 2,77,900 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) from Tuesday's closing level of Rs 2,72,000 per kg. Extending its gains for the fifth consecutive session, gold of 99.9 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 1,000, or nearly 1 per cent, to Rs 1,64,200 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). It had settled at Rs 1,63,200 per 10g in the previous market session. —*PTI*

Rupee dips 1P to settle at 90.96 against USD

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

The rupee stayed range-bound for the second consecutive day on Wednesday and settled 1 paisa lower at 90.96 (provisional) against the US dollar amid higher global crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows. A weaker greenback and positive sentiments in domestic equity markets prevented the rupee's losses, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.94 against the greenback and traded in a narrow range through the session before settling at 90.96 (provisional), down 1 paisa from its previous close. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.05 per cent down at 97.79. —*PTI*

Cricket season boosts travel, says AirBnB

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

India's cricket season is driving a surge in domestic and cross-border travel, according to Airbnb. Searches for match-hosting cities rose sharply year-on-year, particularly beyond major metros. Ranchi recorded nearly 120 per cent growth, while Thiruvananthapuram saw over 110 per cent. Jaipur and Lucknow also posted strong gains. During the India–Pakistan fixture in Colombo, searches surged more than 325 per cent. Ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup final, Ahmedabad saw a 170 per cent rise. Airbnb said Gen Z travellers are extending trips beyond match days, with typical stays lasting three to four days, boosting local tourism and tier-2 destinations. —*PTI*

UP CM secures Rs 11,000 crore MoUs in Japan

TOKYO, 25 FEB

Memoranda of Understanding worth about Rs 11,000 crore were signed with several Japanese firms on the opening day of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's visit to Japan. According to an official statement, agreements were concluded with companies including Kubota Corporation, Minda Corporation, Japan Aviation Electronics Industry, Nagase & Co., Ltd. and Seiko Advance, among others. The partnerships span agricultural machinery, automotive components, electronics, industrial equipment, environmental infrastructure, hospitality and real estate. Officials said the investments are expected to expand manufacturing capacity in Uttar Pradesh, boost advanced automotive electronics and component production, and provide fresh momentum to India–Japan industrial cooperation. —*PTI*

Markets close marginally higher in volatile trade

Sensex up by 50.15 points, while Nifty gains 57.85 points

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty pared early sharp gains to close marginally higher in a volatile session on Wednesday as the US imposing 126 per cent import duties on Indian solar goods dampened investor sentiment and triggered profit-taking.

Retreating around 674 points from the day's high, the 30-share BSE Sensex finally ended 50.15 points or 0.06 per cent higher at 82,276.07.

During the day, it jumped 731.99 points or 0.89 per cent to a high of 82,957.91.

The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 57.85 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 25,482.50. It hit a high of 25,652.60 during the day, up by around 228 points from the last close.

From the Sensex pack, HCL Tech, Tata Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, InterGlobe Aviation, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki and Tech Mahindra were among the biggest gainers.

TCS rose by 2.14 per cent after the IT services giant asserted that it was "not afraid" of artificial intelligence and is also fine with revenue "cannibalisation" through the deployment of AI tools by its associates.

Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Adani Ports and Eternal were among the laggards.

In the broader market, solar sector shares tanked more than 14 per cent after the US announced a preliminary countervailing duty of nearly 126 per cent on imports of certain Indian solar goods, alleging that these products are unfairly subsidised by New Delhi.

The BSE smallcap select index went up by 0.59 per cent and midcap select index advanced 0.37 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, metal jumped the most by 2.64 per cent, followed by auto (1.82 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.53 per cent), commodities (1.49 per cent), healthcare (1.35 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.74 per cent).

Telecommunication, energy, FMCG and realty were the laggards —*PTI*

- Among sectoral indices, metal jumped the most by 2.64 per cent, followed by auto (1.82 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.53 per cent), commodities (1.49 per cent), healthcare (1.35 per cent) & consumer discretionary (0.74 per cent). Telecomm, energy, FMCG and realty were the laggards

'ITEMS UNFAIRLY SUBSIDISED'

US imposes 126% duty on certain Indian solar imports

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The US has announced a preliminary countervailing duty of 125.87 per cent on imports of certain Indian solar goods, alleging that these products are unfairly subsidised by New Delhi.

The US has also announced different duties on the imports of 'Crystalline Silicon Photovoltaic Cells, Whether or Not Assembled into Modules' from Indonesia and Laos. "On 24 February, 2026, the US Department of Commerce announced its preliminary affirmative determinations in the countervailing duty investigations of crystalline silicon photovoltaic cells, whether or not assembled into modules (solar cells), from India, Indonesia, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos)," a US order has said.

These duties are over and above the 10 per cent tariffs announced by the Donald Trump administration on all countries from 24 February.

According to the order, solar imports from India into the US increased to USD 792.6 million in 2024 from USD 83.86 million in 2022.

Countervailing duties help companies to protect them from increase in subsidised imports.

India is taking a series of measures to promote renewable energy production in the country and reduce its import dependence.

Solar energy is one of the key components in this.

India is the world's third-largest solar power producer. —*PTI*

Waaree, Premier Energies shares tank over 14%

Shares of companies related to the solar sector tumbled on Wednesday after the US announced preliminary countervailing duty of 125.87 per cent on imports of certain Indian solar goods.

The stock of Waaree Energies tumbled 14.99 per cent, and Premier Energies tanked 14.23 per cent. Additionally, Vikram Solar and Waaree Energies do not see any material adverse or limited impact from the US duties on Indian solar goods. —PTI

OYO PARENT FIRM APPOINTS EX-SEBI CHIEF AS DIRECTOR

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

IPO-bound OYO's parent entity, PRISM, has appointed former Ajay Tyagi as an Independent Director as it moves closer to a public listing.

The firm said the appointment is aimed at strengthening its board and governance framework ahead of accessing the capital markets. Tyagi, who served as Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India from 2017 to 2022, brings extensive experience in financial-sector policy, market regulation and corporate governance. PRISM founder Ritesh Agarwal said Tyagi's expertise in capital markets regulation and public institution stewardship would support the company's efforts to scale responsibly while maintaining strong governance standards. —*PTI*

4 more held in Rs 590 cr IDFC Bank fraud case

CHANDIGARH, 25 FEB

Haryana's State Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau has arrested four people, including the masterminds behind the Rs 590-crore IDFC First Bank fraud, officials said on Wednesday.

Of the four arrested, two are ex-IDFC First Bank employees and two are private persons who own a partnership firm, they said.

The arrests were made on Tuesday evening as part of the ongoing investigation of the IDFC First Bank fraud case, they said.

Speaking to the media in Panchkula, ACB director general A S Chawla identified the arrested individuals as Ribhav Rishi, Abhay Kumar, Swati Singla, and Abhishek Singla.

While Rishi and Abhay are former employees of the IDFC First Bank, Swati and Abhishek are siblings who ran a firm called the Swastik Desh Project.

Rishi was the head of the bank's Sector 32 branch till six months ago when he left the job.

Abhay, the bank's relationship manager, quit the job around August last year, Chawla said.

He said that, in all, Rs 300 crore was transferred to the Swastik Desh Project's bank account. —*PTI*

TO CUT EMISSIONS

Govt mandates selling of E20 petrol across India from April

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The government has directed that petrol with up to 20 per cent ethanol (E20) and a minimum Research Octane Number (RON) of 95 be sold across all states and Union Territories from 1 April, 2026

The 17 February notification from the Oil Ministry allows exceptions in special circumstances or for specific regions for a limited period.

Ethanol, produced from sugarcane, maize or grain, is renewable, domestically made and burns cleaner than conventional petrol.

The policy aims to reduce oil imports, cut emissions and support farmers by boosting demand for sugarcane, maize and other agricultural surplus.

Industry officials say most vehicles manufactured in India from 2023–25 are designed for E20, with no major issues expected. Older vehicles may see a slight mileage drop of 3–7 per cent, and rubber or plastic components may wear faster.

The minimum RON 95 requirement ensures engines are protected, as RON measures a fuel's resistance to knocking – the damaging pinging that occurs when fuel burns unevenly under compression.

Ethanol naturally has a high-octane value (around 108 RON), so blending 20 per cent increases knock resistance.

Encouraged by achieving 10 per cent ethanol blending in petrol five months ahead of schedule in June 2022, government advanced E20 mandate from 2030 to 2025–26. —*PTI*

New fuel efficiency rules under review

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The power ministry has submitted the proposal for Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE)-III norms to the Prime Minister's Office, following consultations with stakeholders, Union Heavy Industries Minister H**D Kumaraswamy** said on Wednesday.

The move comes amid differences in the auto industry over whether small cars should receive leniency in fuel efficiency targets. Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd Managing Director & CEO Shailesh Chandra argued that concessions based on weight or affordability could compromise safety and distract from sustainable mobility goals. In contrast, Maruti Suzuki India Chairman R C Bhargava supports such exemptions, noting that CAFE norms are primarily designed to improve fuel efficiency in larger vehicles.

Introduced in 2017, CAFE norms set limits on average fuel consumption and CO2 emissions across a manufacturer's fleet. CAFE-II began in 2022, and CAFE-III is expected from April 2027. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency released draft regulations in Sept 2025 for industry feedback. —*PTI*

Shocking: Scindia on BSNL Director's 'underwear, hair oil' task for officials

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Wednesday slammed the "absurd and shocking" demands and arrangements linked to BSNL director Vivek Banzal's proposed visit to Prayagraj, saying a show-cause notice has been issued for violation of rules and the "unacceptable" conduct.

The cancelled two-day visit, scheduled for 25-26 February, included a tightly planned schedule with a dip at the Sangam, a boat ride, and visits to Bade Hanuman Mandir, Akshayavat, and Patalpuri temples.

The itinerary reportedly included around 20 tasks and involved 50 officials assigned to manage every aspect of the trip, including transport, accommodation, and personal arrangements for Banzal.

A show-cause notice has been issued to Vivek Banzal, Director (Consumer Fixed Access) of the BSNL Board, and the visit has been cancelled pending an official inquiry.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Scindia said the episode was "unacceptable" and one that "flouts all rules and traditions". An order like this is "unacceptable" in new India, Scindia said, adding that a show cause notice has been issued. Scindia termed it "beyond absurd" and "shocking". —*PTI*

Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia; BSNL Director Vivek Banzal –*x*

GOVT'S IRFC SHARE SALE FAILS TO GET FULL SUBSCRIPTION

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

The government's 2 per cent share sale offer in Indian Railway Finance Corporation Ltd (IRFC) received a subdued response from institutional investors on Wednesday, with the issue failing to get full subscription.

At the close of market hours at 3.30pm, institutional investors placed bids for over 22.34 crore IRFC shares, which is 94.98 per cent of the over 23.52 crore shares on the block for the offer for sale (OFS). At an indicative price of Rs 104.12 apiece, institutional investors put in bids for about Rs 2,326 crore. Retail investors will bid in the share sale on Thursday.

Shares of IRFC closed at Rs 104.55, down 4.43 per cent over previous close on BSE. —*PTI*

'HAS 6L AI FLUENT WORKERS'

TCS urges staff to use AI despite risk to revenue

MUMBAI, 25 FEB

Country's largest IT services company TCS is "not afraid" of artificial intelligence and is also fine with revenue "cannibalisation" through the deployment of AI tools by its associates, a top official said on Wednesday.

TCS is finding that senior level employees are slower in building AI-based solutions compared to the "proficient" younger staff, its Managing Director and Chief Executive K Krithivasan said at the annual NTLF event here.

"We encourage our associates to go out (to the customers and use AI), even if it means cannibalising our revenues," Krithivasan said.

TCS is "insisting" that each of its over 6 lakh staffers are AI fluent, Krithivasan said, insisting that the company is not "afraid" of the new technology taking away livelihood. As part of the same efforts, the company has asked associates to explore how it can use AI in projects, even if it means forgoing some part of revenues, he said. Krithivasan said everybody wants to learn the new AI skills, and there is no case of creating incentives for them to learn.

However, as people climb up the hierarchy and become senior level employees, they tend to read a lot but do not build anything on it, Krithivasan said.

It is not about just giving a few prompts to a generational AI platform like ChatGPT, he said, adding that staffers have to get their hands dirty and build solutions using the AI tools. —*PTI*

Smartphones are India's top export in 2025: IT Minster

NEW DELHI, 25 FEB

Smartphones have emerged as India's top export category, with overseas shipments worth USD 30 billion in 2025, Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced on Wednesday.

Sharing the milestone on social media, he described India as "becoming the smartphone manufacturing factory for the world."

In 2025, mobile phone production in India reached Rs 5.5 lakh crore (USD 60 billion), up from exports worth Rs 2 lakh crore (USD 22 billion) in 2024–25.

Overall electronics exports crossed Rs 4 lakh crore (USD 44 billion) last year and are expected to grow further as four new semiconductor plants begin production.

Neil Shah, Co-Founder and VP at Counterpoint Research, said Apple's shift of manufacturing to India post-US tariffs on China has positioned the country as a global export hub.

India produced almost 30 crore mobile units in 2025, with one in four exported, driven by high-value markets like the US. —*PTI*

India in must-win Super 8s game against Zimbabwe

India needs to fix the issues with opening and the No.3 slot

CHENNAI, 25 FEB

Bogged down by top-order brittleness and under pressure after a heavy loss, defending champions India would need every ounce of resilience they can muster when they take on a tricky Zimbabwe in their second Super 8s match of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

Winning this contest by a big margin is critical to India's existence in the ICC showpiece, given the beating their net run rate (-3.80) took after the 76-run defeat to South Africa on Sunday.

But for that, India needs to fix the issues surrounding the opening and the No.3 slots.

Coming into this World Cup, the reigning champions rode on excellence from Ishan Kishan and Abhishek Sharma at the pole position to quell the bilateral challenges against South Africa and New Zealand at home.

But light seems to have gone out of Abhishek's batting after a stomach infection. A combination of dull pitches and off-spinners, who took the ball away from his hitting arc, has reduced the left-hander's firepower.

He is certainly a better batter than his current numbers 15 runs from four matches at an average of 3.75 made at a strike-rate of 75.

However, the real question is, can he set aside the desire to play his natural game and grind some runs against his name?

–PTI

The heavy loss to South Africa in their Super 8 opener was the "shakeup" title favourites India needed going into the business end of the T20 World Cup, said former head coach Ravi Shastri.

India will be desperate to make a strong comeback against Zimbabwe here on Thursday after the heavy 76-run defeat at the hands of South Africa in their Super 8 opener in Ahmedabad on Sunday.—*PTI*

Ishan Kishan and Abhishek Sharma –PTI

India needs to rethink team composition: Shastri

Zimbabwe coach wary of India blitzkrieg

Zimbabwe coach Justin Sammons expects India to come out hard against them in their crucial Group 1 Super Eights encounter at MA Chidambaram Stadium here on Thursday. Sammons anticipates that the Suryakumar Yadav-led side will approach the game in their usual, predictable way, as has been the case with India in the past two years. After shining in the initial part of the tournament, Zimbabwe lost to West Indies by 107 runs at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Monday. West Indies (254/6) posted the second-highest total in the tournament history. In reply, Zimbabwe were bowled out for 147 in 17.4 overs. "We know the way India is going to come out, and it's going to be very similar to the way West Indies approached their innings. They (India) are not going to hold back," Sammons said. "There will be good learnings from that and how we deal with that, under pressure in the moment, how do we stay calm and just think on our feet, and also just try and change things up a little bit

T20 WORLD CUP 2026

WI batting firepower to face Proteas pace test

AHMEDABAD, 25 FEB

The West Indies' big-hitting ability will face a stern test from South Africa when the two unbeaten teams square off in a Super 8s clash of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday, looking to tighten their grip on a semifinal spot.

South Africa comes into the contest after a commanding 76-run win over home-favourites India in Ahmedabad, while the West Indies hammered Zimbabwe by 107 runs in their previous outing in Mumbai to underline their batting firepower.

West Indies' line-up, packed with power-hitters, has shown the ability to take the game away in a matter of overs.

However, they will now be up against a balanced South African bowling attack that dismantled India here on Sunday.

It was a collective effort from the bowling unit comprising Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, and Lungi Ngidi, whose pace variations have foxed the best of batters in the tournament thus far.

South Africa's batting, too, has done the job consistently. David Miller remains the crisis man for the Proteas, and he showed that with a match-winning effort against India after the setbacks in the powerplay.

The contest promises intriguing individual battles. Hetmyer's aggressive strokeplay against Rabada's pace and bounce could set the tone, while Powell's ability to dominate spin will be tested by Maharaj's accuracy and changes of pace.

Miller's experience against left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein and Jansen's bounce against Brandon King at the top are other match-ups that could influence the outcome of the contest.

Unlike previous night games in Ahmedabad, an afternoon contest could present a different dynamic.

The absence of dew is likely to make conditions even across both innings, reducing the toss advantage.

The surface may also be slightly drier, bringing spinners into play earlier, while the heat could test fitness and intensity in the field. —*PTI*

Brook played the best innings of his life: Afridi

Pakistan pacer Shaheen Afridi praised England captain Harry Brook for playing "the best innings of his life" after the big-hitter's sensational hundred took his team into the T20 World Cup semifinals here. Shaheen had found Brooks' stumps with a yorker, a ball after the England skipper slammed a 50-ball century in the Super-8 fixture here on Tuesday. "I think this will be the best innings of his life. He should be credited for playing a proper cricketing shot.

–PTI

Bangladesh to tour Australia after 22 years

DUBAI, 25 FEB

International Test cricket will return to the Australian city of Darwin for the first time in over two decades in August, organisers said on Wednesday as they unveiled the schedule for an upcoming series against Bangladesh. Cricket Australia said the first of two Tests against Bangladesh would kick off on August 13 in the Northern Territory capital, the first such match there since July 2004, when it hosted Sri Lanka. It will also be Bangladesh's first tour of Australia since 2004, when it played three ODIs, losing all of them. Bangladesh vs Australia 13-17 August Australia vs Bangladesh 22-26 August Great Barrier Reef Arena.—*PTI*

–PTI

PGTI's 72 The League: Talwar beats Rashid

GREATER NOIDA, 25 FEB

Saptak Talwar produced clutch golf down the closing stretch to slay Rashid Khan in a second-round singles match of PGTI's 72 The League here on Wednesday. Talwar's Mumbai Aces recovered from a poor opening day and tallied nine points against Kolkata Classics to reach 11 points. The overnight leaders, Rajasthan Regals, did not have the best day, winning just one match and halving another against Charminar Champions, but remained at the top of the standings (17 points), where they were joined by UP Prometheans.The Prometheans were denied a solo lead by a magic second shot from inside the trees by American Jhared Hack on the last hole. A hooked 8-iron second shot from 180 yards went straight in for an eagle.—*PTI*

Cheating in chess is made out to be bigger than what it actually is: Gukesh

PRAGUE, 25 FEB

Cheating in chess is being portrayed as a bigger problem than it actually is, says world champion D Gukesh, who does not support Russian Grandmaster Vladimir Kramnik's controversial crusade against the menace that affects the online game.

Kramnik, a former world champion, has sued the International Chess Federation (FIDE) for defamation after the world body lambasted his allegations of cheating against late American Grandmaster Daniel Naroditsky and Czechia's David Navara.

Naroditsky's death became a major flashpoint in international chess as, in his last video stream, he talked about being under mental stress due to Kramnik's allegations. However, a recent medical report ruled his death to be accidental, caused by a cardiac issue.

"Obviously, I am against any kind of unfair or unethical play. I have never done that, and I really hope nobody does that.

It's a kind of problem that we have been seeing lately," Gukesh said in the pre-tournament press conference of the Prague Chess Festival here. —*PTI*

Daniil Medvedev through to QFs of Dubai Tennis C'ships

DUBAI, 25 FEB

Russian tennis star Daniil Medvedev has advanced to the quarterfinals of the 2026 Dubai Tennis Championships after he defeated on Wednesday Stan Wawrinka from Switzerland.

In a match that lasted one hour and 13 minutes, the 3rd-seeded Medvedev, who is playing under a neutral status at the tournament, outplayed his wildcard Swiss opponent in straight sets 6-2, 6-3.

In the next round, Medvedev will play against unseeded American Jenson Brooksby, who reached the quarterfinals after defeating another Russian player, 7th-seed Karen Khachanov, 7-6; 6-4.

Medvedev, 30, spent sixteen weeks as the world's number one player in 2022. —*PTI*

Kalaburagi to host Int'l women's tennis tournament

KALABURAGI, 25 FEB

Rising star Vaishnavi Adkar will be among a host of Indian players to feature in the ITF W35 Kalaburagi, the biggest international women's tennis tournament to be held here, from1 to 8 March.

The USD 30,000 tournament, part of the ITF Women's World Tennis Tour, marks the city's first-ever ITF W35-level women's professional event. The tournament to be played at the Chandrashekar Patil Stadium will feature a 32-player singles main draw, preceded by a 32-player qualifying event beginning on 1 March, along with a 16-team doubles draw. Main draw matches will commence on 3 March. As an ITF W35-category event, it offers valuable ranking points and an important opportunity for players aspiring to progress to higher-tier competitions, including the WTA Tour. The event has attracted a competitive international field from 11 countries, including Thailand's Achisa Chanta. —*PTI*

RANJI TROPHY FINAL

J&K consolidate to 527/6 as sparks fly post Dogra head-butt

HUBBALI, 25 FEB

Skipper Paras Dogra made a gutsy 70, but his intentional head-butting of Karnataka substitute KV Aneesh overshadowed an otherwise solid batting performance from Jammu and Kashmir, who reached 527 for 6 at stumps on the second day of the Ranji Trophy final.

Dogra, along with keeper batter Kanhaiya Wadhawan (70), Sahil Lotra (57 batting) all made handsome contributions as it became a real toil for the Karnataka bowlers, save Prasidh Krishna (3/90 in 29 overs), who didn't make much of an impact.

However, it was 21-season Ranji veteran Dogra's boorish behaviour that surprised one and all as he was captured on camera head-butting the silly point fielder Aneesh after getting a streaky boundary when Prasidh had literally squared him up. It wasn't clear if any of Aneesh's words would have hurt the domestic legend, who confronted Aneesh and butted on Aneesh's helmet, prompting his senior teammate Mayank Agarwal to interject and stand between the two.

Paras Dogra and KV Aneesh – PTI

It wasn't a big thing: Dogra

Jammu and Kashmir skipper Paras Dogra on Wednesday downplayed the on-field incident in which he head-butted Karnataka player KV Aneesh, saying it wasn't a "big thing" during the second day's play in the Ranji Trophy final here. Dogra was involved in a heated exchange with substitute fielder Aneesh and head-butted him on the helmet shortly after hitting a four off Prasidh Krishn

Brief Scores

Jammu and Kashmir 527/6 in 156 overs (Shubham Pundir 121, Yawer Hassan 88, Paras Dogra 70, Kanhaiya Wadhawan 70, Sahil Lotra 54 batting, Prasidh Krishna 3/90) vs Karnataka. —*PTI*

India stuns Aus in shoot-out to register maiden win

HOBART, 25 FEB

The Indian men's hockey team ended a prolonged losing streak in the FIH Pro League, upstaging world No. 3 Australia 3-1 in a shoot-out after both sides were locked 1-1 at the end of regulation time, in Hobart on Wednesday.

It was a close battle between the two teams in the first three quarters, which ended goalless, but a win in their final game of the Hobart leg of the Pro League should be a confidence-booster for the Indians.

Australia finally took the lead in the 49th minute through a penalty corner conversion by Jeremy Hayward. But the home team's joy was short-lived as Shilanand Lakra (51st) scored a fine field goal two minutes later to draw level.

Thereafter, both teams tried hard to score the all-important winner but failed as the match went into the shoot-out. —*PTI*

–PTI

NO PLACE FOR DISCRIMINATION

Players must not be excluded on nationality : ECB

LONDON, 25 FEB

The England and Wales Cricket Board and franchises of The Hundred have issued a joint statement to assert that players must not be excluded on grounds of nationality amid fears that Pakistani cricketers could be deliberately ignored by at least four Indian-owned teams at next month's auction.

Four out of the eight franchises Manchester Super Giants (RPSG Group), MI London (Reliance), Southern Brave (GMR), and Sunrisers Leeds (Sun Group) are linked to team owners in the IPL, and according to reports in the British media, all of them would avoid Pakistani players.

–PTI

However, even without any Indian presence among the owners, only two Pakistan players were a part of The Hundred last year, and overall, just nine have managed to feature in the first five seasons.

The new owners will take charge of the operations from this season onwards.

"The Hundred was established to reach new audiences, grow the game of cricket and ensure that everyone regardless of their ethnicity, gender, faith, nationality or other can feel they belong in our sport. Players must not be excluded on the grounds of their nationality," asserted the joint statement from the ECB and all eight owners, including the ones with IPL links.

"As the governing body responsible for running the tournament, the ECB is committed to ensuring there is no place for discrimination, and has regulations in place to take robust action to tackle any such conduct. —*PTI*

Sorloth hat-trick propels Madrid into round of 16

MADRID, 25 FEB

Atletico Madrid striker Alexander Sorloth scored a hat-trick as the Spanish side saw off Belgium's Club Brugge on Tuesday night to win the second leg of their Champions League playoff 4-1 and advance to the last 16 with a 7-4 aggregate triumph.

Johnny Cardoso scored the other goal for the home side while Joel Ordonez netted for Brugge in the 36th minute.

Atletico opened the scoring after Brugge's Hugo Vetlesen had two good chances blocked in the early stages as the Belgians came out of the blocks with attacking intent and a high-pressing game despite being unfancied after a 3-3 draw in the first leg last week. But Atletico's quality triumphed after a dominant second half, and it goes into Friday's round-of-16 draw to determine whether it will play either Liverpool or Tottenham Hotspur.

Sorloth cracked home a shot that squeezed under the body of Brugge's veteran goalkeeper Simon Mignolet in the 23rd minute after he cleverly held up a long kick out by home goalkeeper Jan Oblak. —*PTI*